

AN AFFAIR OF LOVE

By Kay Dick

**BY THE LAKE
YOUNG MAN
AN AFFAIR OF LOVE**

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A LOVER'S instinct is acute, and sexual desire impregnated with love is almost too insufferable for endurance—which is why, in the beginning, I decided to leave love out of it.

I went to Paris to forget about love, acquiescent and ready to sustain any relationship to which my inclination might lead me. This is not to say that my trip was conceived solely for such a purpose. Merely that I accept the inevitabilities of the recurring cycle of sexuality. I went to Paris without love, but I knew that inevitably, at some time, I should physically desire someone.

Why to Paris? Perhaps because, subconsciously, I did not wish to be too far away from my familiar landscape. Moreover, I love Paris, and even though I had decided not to give love to any human being, I was still able and willing to give it to a city. I felt at ease in Paris and, having broken with my immediately familiar surroundings, I needed that certain amount of comfort which only known streets and the sense of a friendly people can impart.

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If for some weeks, some many weeks, you had been, as I had, living on your nerves, buffeted to and fro in a whirlpool of quarrels, eating spasmodically, drinking more than usual, over-smoking until half-drugged by nicotine, watching the pile of unfinished work increase beyond all possibility of completion, then you will know how welcome is the peak of an emotional crisis. However personally disastrous the outcome, nothing can bring relief as the release of a decision. Blessed, blessed almost is defeat itself, if the struggle to outwit this eventuality has been too strenuous. Similarly relaxed is the gambler when, having tossed his last counter on the table and lost, he knows finally there is no more scope for optimism. The relief is miraculously curative, if only because the nervous system is utterly numbed through complete destitution. This is the kind of truth one accepts in one's thirties.

For a number of years I had been in love. For a number of years I had lived with the person to whom I had given my love. It was a difficult love because we were both difficult people. Why did it go wrong? If I began to explain this I should be involved in telling quite another story from this present tale:—a tale set in London, set in Venice, set in Rome, and set near Clarens in Switzerland. This present tale is set entirely in Paris during the

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summer, and beyond that I do not, at the moment, propose to go, since I am concerned only with the fact that I went to Paris and met Pierre.

When, prior to my visit to Paris, I reached this ambiguous state of grace, I felt within me something which was not unrelated to pure joy. Purged, because I had so extravagantly used all my nervous reserves within such a short space of time, I was able to detach myself from the wreckage. Then I decided to go to Paris. Then, indirectly, Pierre came into my life. It was a very simple decision that I made at the time.

I can remember how, on a sunny afternoon, I discussed this with a friend. How easy it was or then appeared to be. "And some good impersonal sex wouldn't harm me either," I added to our agreement about the efficacy of a change of scenery when one's habitual life appeared broken into a thousand pieces. I laughed and went out into the street, humming *La vie en rose*, able, for the first time for some weeks, to return to my view of the world which held a multitude of casual people.

Thus, in the beginning it can be said that it was all more or less deliberate. The intention resulted from a certain callous planning. Yet some set of unpremeditated circumstances, outside the range of mere deliberation, brought Pierre.

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Pierre waiting, waiting for someone, waiting for whom? For anyone perhaps, for any mad Irishman, for any woman—waiting even for a woman like me, as indeed, oddly enough, it turned out to be.

The setting was conventional, commonplace and simple. Paris, a June morning, and two people sitting in a café surrounded by several other people.

We laughed at the American because in Paris everyone laughs at Americans. We laugh when the American sprawls his legs over the recognized right of way between the café tables and the pavement's kerb, throws his head back and throatily tells everyone: "Boy, am I going to get drunk? Boy am I!" We laugh when that same American (he is always the same with a different face), sobered and hesitant because midday has not yet struck, drawls in over-guttural syllables his explanation of existentialism. We laugh when the American, made self-conscious by the late afternoon sun, looks about him for a girl only to find another American engaged in exactly the same kind of pursuit. We meet him some time later with the girl he manages to appropriate temporarily, and for whose sake he is over-tipping and paying for everyone's drinks, and we laugh because if we did not laugh, we should feel immensely depressed, since there is something quite definitely depressing about an American in Paris, no

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matter how golden his hair, how hard his muscles, or stuffed with banknotes is his wallet.

Our American was on his way to drunkenness, resolutely, as only Americans drinking whisky in Paris can be. Superciliously we sipped at our morning aperitif, sparing time between sips, to wonder at the luminosity of the lemon peel floating gently with the ice in the glass, and as we carefully rested our glasses on the saucers, we did exactly what anyone might have done in such a situation. We glanced towards each other and smiled—briefly, no more. A casual encounter of courtesy. Then, because neither of us was waiting for anyone in particular, we followed the glance with a more definite enquiry of eye, and the commonplace act of assessment between man and woman began.

The American, who was sitting in front of us, turned round. He was losing his last listener, an elderly Frenchman who had done his best to understand what the American was saying and who had politely offered his reason for departure.

"Okay, boy! You get your *déjeuner*," said the American. "Guess I'll stick around here."

Now, we had the American all to ourselves merely because we were the nearest people to him.

"You British?" His nod indicated me.

I acknowledged the Commonwealth, and watched

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Pierre, although at the time I did not know it was Pierre, denying the Commonwealth in favour of the Republique.

"Mind if I join you?" The American meant he had decided we three made a party.

"What I like about Paris," said the American stamping one foot to stress his point, "is that it is just so Continental. Yeah! So Continental! I like that!"

He waved his arms for the waiter who, trained to just this kind of Continental display, glanced at the drinks on our three separate tables, and walked away for three more of the same kind.

It was a beginning and yet so easily it might have been nothing at all. There were the three marbled-top tables isolated from each other by their basket chairs. Three tables and six chairs, almost a section of a chess board. It might so easily have happened that neither the American, Pierre nor myself occupied, as we then did, three of those six chairs at precisely the same moment, and indeed having done so, each flanked by an empty chair, we might so easily have remained unconnected by talk.

Talk is an easy matter to provoke in a Paris café, an easy matter to take or to leave alone. In Paris, talk is a necessary supplement to the aperitif, particularly to the midday aperitif, particularly if it is,

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as it then was, a scintillating June morning, radiating with clarity, encouraging spontaneity.

It was for just such a morning that I had come to Paris. There I sat, under the orange awning of Weber's Café, watching the brisk bustle of the mid-day crowd contributing to the radiant mobility of the rue Royale. The setting was deliberate, in so far that I had selected it as a beginning. From a winter-drenched English spring, I had come to find, as I knew I must find, this invigorating pulsation of the rue Royale. It was all exactly what I knew and intended, and inevitably I became as I had planned, part of the sub-volcanic quivering of movement and anticipation. I needed this most desperately. I needed to share this common experience, and the pressure of Paris took me along with it as unconcernedly as it propelled a million others. I needed to become part of that generic yet intimate elegance, part of that feverish yet aloof gaiety. The scene exactly fitted my urgent and chaotic need.

That is how it was, with the talk to be taken, and every reason why I should accept all the talk to be found at any café in Paris. I had longed, ached for such talk, if only because, fluent, ridiculous and inconsequential as it was, I did not need to remember a word of it. Deliberately therefore, I gave myself over to such talk, savouring the essential wantonness

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of its impermanency, welcoming its fundamental futility, applauding its superficiality—I who had been so inflexibly subjugated to another kind of talk. I was in bondage no longer. I had escaped from the yoke of talk which requires a constant, disciplined and anxious ear. I could choose a word here, a word there; misinterpret a phrase; even stop listening. I could do all these things, because, at Weber's on that June morning, there were no words which I must absolutely listen to.

I could take the talk as it came, and leave it with the tip under the saucer, because the words could equally be intended for someone else. I abandoned myself to the plurality of the hour, the place and the people, I who had left the particular behind me.

The American was saying everything he had said before on similar occasions, and which he would say all over again the day afterwards until the day of his departure, which no one would notice because another American would replace him in order to repeat it all, and to keep the business of continuity in motion. And because, although stupid, it was so very simple, it was to some extent graceful and endearing, since useless words with their lack of strain possess, at times, an odd recuperative essence which the tired and jaded require.

Then suddenly the American was no more. How

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and when he rose from his chair I cannot now remember, since there is always some American rising from a café chair in Paris. I remember this particular American because, when he was no longer there, I was left with Pierre, and Pierre was left with me, and it was inevitable that Pierre should move slightly towards me and ask me whether he could order me another drink.

"I think that even then, from that most ordinary courtesy, we both acknowledged our mutual pre-occupation. I appreciated this, although I had shed all responsibility, even though I was glowingly remote from all human bondage. Perhaps it was because I was consciously severed from all such relationships that I chose to accept what Pierre offered, since I knew I could drop it at any moment with no feeling of discomfort or loss, in fact without thought or feeling. It was a new experience deliberately to involve myself in a personal contact, knowing full well that I need not bother to remember any shade of it unless I chose to do so. I remember thinking, as Pierre moved from his chair to the vacant one at my table, that this was my time of joy, this time of not caring whether Pierre took the trouble to move over so that he might be nearer to me.

"You look happy," he said, because even he, then

an absolute stranger, could not fail to notice the laughter I radiated, because it was a joyful novelty not to care whether someone sat near or miles away.

"One is always happy in Paris—or so they say."

"Holiday?" he asked.

"Yes." I hardly paused to consider the truth of the matter, since it could reasonably be assumed that I was on holiday, sitting at Weber's as I had planned, with no thought of how I should spend my next hour. Yes, I repeated, I was ~~on~~ holiday, insisting on the fact, making the decision then and there because it must be so, for I was not anticipating any hour to come. I was grateful to Pierre because he put this holiday idea before me, made me dwell upon its possibilities, brought me to realise that no longer were my future hours bound to any previous action. As far as I could anticipate I should be on holiday for ever.

"Alone?" He was still questioning.

Surely, I asked, was this not evident? Although it could not be an entirely accurate statement for at the moment I was with him, or was he with me? As my mockery appeared to confuse him, hastily I assured him that I was alone, being by myself, responsible only to myself, denuded of all external concern. Yet could I not choose, as I had indeed chosen, to be accompanied, since I had allowed him

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to join me at my table, willingly choose to be or not to be alone?

"And you?" I asked, simply because he had bought me a drink, and it was therefore necessary to express some interest in him. "And you?" I repeated, because I did not care.

"Me?" He shrugged his shoulders, hesitated as though it mattered what he might say, and said he lived in Paris. Then he scowled, although I am certain he did not intend to do so, and I was pleased he did scowl, because when he scowled I began to look at him.

As I looked at him, looked at him while he was talking about Paris, I wondered whether I would recognize him if I met him again, because he was very much like a lot of other fairly tall dark men in their early thirties, and it was quite possible that I could pass him in the street and not remember that I knew him, because his was the kind of face that a lot of pleasant and amiably-featured men carry about with them. Pleasant and amiable features which safeguard them and us from the painful pull of memory. I was glad that, although pleasant and amiable, he was unremarkable, because it suited my mood that he should be easy to forget. I wanted to lean forward and touch him, if only to thank him for his wholesome anonymity, to thank him for

not being, in any way, immediately recognizable.

As my small thanksgiving went out to him, it was then that he chose to turn his eyes directly upon mine, giving me one sharp moment of pain, as I realised that he, this stranger, possessed a memorable quality. Contrasting rashly with the general impassive uniformity of his features were definite and irreconcilable grey eyes. You too, I thought, can be remembered, although, at the time, this knowledge was in no way disturbing, because I had deliberately come to Paris to forget a pair of eyes which many have remembered as green.

As he looked at me with those definite grey eyes, absurdly guarded by long dark lashes, I knew a decision had to be taken, and I took it, because there was no reason why I should not, because in taking the decision I was acting on my own account. I was freed from the compulsion of intimacy, delivered from the hypnotic coercion of desire, unfettered by love and the obsession of need. I could accept or reject the possibility of those grey eyes. It was not inevitable that I should submit to their influence, since, then, I had no desire to claim them as a permanent landscape to my own.

So I decided to take him with his grey eyes and his unremarkable yet pleasant features, simply because I was able to reject him; he could not

possibly know how exciting it was for me to select, if only because such an action was like some language I had once known, long ago, and never since used or indeed attempted to use; I had become acclimatized to the language of possession. I had torn the roots out of the ground and left them free of the familiar soil. I had broken away from the roots and required no soil for coverage, since there was in me nothing more than disinterestedness, and even at that I did not care or want to look.

Suddenly I realised that he, this man with the grey eyes, was telling me his name, that indeed he was repeating it.

"Pierre, oh yes, Pierre," I said, catching at the Christian name and letting the surname fall beyond my hearing, since Pierre would serve my purpose if I decided upon any kind of purpose. I gave him my name, quickly, because it did not matter at all.

Then I laughed. "Your waistcoat is too tight," I said, because it was true that his navy-blue waistcoat was too tight, and also because I had to laugh at him as he sat there, waiting for me to help him to enlarge the scope of our conversation.

Inevitably the talk turned on love and life and the sad adventures of personal relationships. It was rather like throwing dice on the marble-top café table, between the glasses and the ice bucket and

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the siphon. And there was no one to observe—only the waiter flicking past, attending to empty glasses, bringing fresh siphons, and not even wondering when we would pay and go.

There was no end to what, between drinks, we did with love and life; no pauses to consider and reconsider the validity of the tumbling aphorisms and the quixotic valuations. Everything was said that strangers say to each other about life and love, and there was no need to remember who had said what, nor to recapitulate the argument, since it was more an exercise in words than a conversation. They were not only our words but phrases we shared with a million others, since a million other strangers had used them, polished them, and passed them from generation to generation like old ballads whose origins no one ever tracked down.

“And you?” Pierre leant forward, making me catch my breath, when I realised that the personal had managed to find a way even through our maze of life and love generalizations. His question forced me back to our previous words, drove me to recall that our talk had reached the stage which proffered the dictum that love must be controlled, must not be allowed to swamp independent decision, to detract from the main purpose of life. Yes, we had come to this ordinary conclusion, that love was a

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matter which only the strong-minded should indulge in, and that it was best never to compromise or to bargain. To take it or discard it, if it became too troublesome—and here, was Pierre, asking whether I had been able to deal with this matter of love.

Then it was that I decided to use him, to take up this Pierre, this dark-haired man with the grey eyes, who dared to question me about love. I felt suddenly vicious towards him who so impertinently brought the personal into our anonymity.

"I don't answer such questions," I said. "But I'll ask them if that's what you want."

He laughed softly, angering me further as he lightly touched my wrist.

"We shall have to find out, won't we?" He grinned.

"How boringly masculine!" I snapped at him. "How boringly expected and commonplace a remark."

"Don't women ever say such things?" He was still smiling, and I noticed that one corner of his mouth stretched into a small scar, a pale indentation in his tanned face.

"Women," I began, then stopped, remembering all the essence of what women did say. "And why should we find out?"

I caught his grey eyes with my own, knowing, as neither of us turned our look away, that somehow

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we should, not find out about love, because love was a matter I was not carrying with me, but explore the callousness of physical desire which was there for us to take from each other if we wanted. I had nothing more than callousness to offer, and if he wished to accept this as desire, I would not retreat from such an oddly inquisitive adventure. Such an experience suited my mood and my life as I then felt it, denuded of any desire to give. It would provide me with an unusual novelty this desire without love, this desire deliberately taken. I looked more closely at this man from whom I intended to take, to whom I should give nothing more durable than my time, and that only as and when time required the ease and comfort of another body.

"Will you be here later?" he asked. "About six?"

Almost primly he told me about his work, some laboratory where he was expected that afternoon, where he must go in order to complete his day's work. Listening, I hardly cared where he was going, and hardly at all thought about the possibility of his not returning, since that would not matter, although I knew he would return, or rather I knew that he would be at Weber's at six o'clock if I cared to come back at that hour.

It was possible, I said, that I would be here, because I was very fond of Weber's, and I would

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return to Weber's automatically at that time of the day and evening considered suitable for the aperitif.

Fundamentally indifferent though I was to Pierre's eventual return, I was glad that when he reached the newspaper kiosk he should stop, turn and wave to me, as though he and I were dear friends with equally dear friends and tastes in common. I returned his wave and told myself that I liked him, that he was nice, that perhaps he might add to my detached pleasure of Paris, and rising from the café chair at Weber's, I strolled out into the temperate zones of crowd life.

There is in each of us a resentment against that which life compels us to cherish, although often we wish to throw it from us, pausing not to ask for compassion or tenderness or even mercy. It is of the love in us that I am speaking, the cruel sea that divides us utterly from our kinsmen and our ambitions, and makes us willing heretics to the lessons of high endeavour which many taught us in our youth. Because of this, often we cry in the night and pace the afternoon away, simply because we have become intimate with love which our

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mothers taught us to respect and revere and anticipate. Even the best and strongest lose our sense of navigation, when we submit to the endless tides of possession and anxiety and torment and despair, which drive the weakest to abandon their skeletons upon an alien shore. Yet, because memory is among our attributes, among our needs, we bless life that gives us the power to remember how fully we suffer grief because of love. Our desolation contains our joy, since we grieve for what we desired, had and eventually lost, because loss is a logical reaction to gain. If only we could adapt ourselves to the circumstances of love's pain, as speedily as we stimulate the circumstances of love's pleasure, we should be able to turn our minds towards the higher purposes of life to which our parents dedicated us.

And this resentment in us, because of the love which we jettison into another's harbour, is worse than a vision of angels or a reflection of hell, which we know we shall come to, since because of love, we scheme to arrest the natural evolutionary trend of desire which frees only one of the afflicted. The mutilated one is left like some unfinished biological design, a creature not of the land nor of the sea, able only to paddle frantically along the foreshore, unclaimed and unharnessed, consequently joining the ranks of the shunned and shunning.

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Such a resentment drove me to Paris. Because of it, I walked along the rue St. Honoré, assuming the shopper's mannerisms, eyes trained to the array of gloves, hats, suitcases, underclothes, jewellery and *objets d'art*—all displayed behind polished glass for my especial and casual observation. Indefatigably, I disciplined myself to stop as though impelled through great interest, before every third or fourth square of glass, and assess my reaction to the gaudy scarf, the bonbonnière, the dressing-case, the tall wine-glass, the range of lipsticks. In this way, I told myself, I will fill my mind with the inessentials of life. Who is to say that these articles are less essential than love and the hatred that love foreshadows? Who is to say that love is part of the cohesion of life? What childhood myth instructed this?

I stopped in front of a bookshop. I was in the rue St. Honoré for the express purpose of assuming the guise of a possible shopper, and I must be concerned with quality and price and the unusual novelty which can be bought.

Then I noticed the print, recognized it as the same lithograph which I had seen in this shop-window some ten months before. Accepting the shock of familiarity, and the instinctive recoil from it, I remembered how, when I had last seen this print, I had not had enough money to buy it. Undoubtedly

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it was the same. There were the sharp insinuating bones of the profile showing Sarah Bernhardt in eighteen-seventy-nine at the height of her career; a splendid illustration of a remarkable personality. I was glad it was there ready for me, waiting for me to enter the shop and buy it. I could now buy it, as I had wanted to when I wished to give it away.

I think I must have laughed aloud, because an elderly man peering in at the window's contents jumped a little, glanced at me quickly and then scurried off. I did not wholly blame him. How could he know that I was, in a sense, the owner of this lithograph of Sarah Bernhardt, which I had not been able to buy for someone ten months back and, which now, I would not buy immediately.

Immensely and childishly pleased with my decision, I moved away from the bookshop window that held Sarah Bernhardt's profile, knowing that the lithograph belonged to me, since in spite of ten months, it was still there for me to buy now that I had money to waste, and no one to give it to. I walked away forgetting I was walking the rue St. Honoré, remembering only that, once, I had desired to make a purchase.

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By six o'clock I had regained my self-possession, and at approximately thirty minutes past the hour, I walked towards Pierre whom I had a momentary difficulty in recognizing, because he had changed his suit. With some amusement I inspected his light fawn outfit. A soft attire stressing summer in the contrast of the white silk shirt against the brown tan of his face. Glancing down I saw the white socks, 'so fashionable an illustration of the Frenchman's holiday and week-end spirit.

He blushed slightly, knowing I was viewing his clothes with a different eye.

"Do you mind my looking at you?" I asked.

"I am taking you to the Closerie des Lilas," he said, and I knew we would go on in this way with our unanswered questions and our statements.

"You are curious like me," he remarked as we sat at the table near the long windows overlooking the café terrasse. "Do you like this place?"

"Yes," I spoke slowly. "I've always liked it."

Looking about me I acknowledged surroundings which were familiar: the yellow tone of the room, the lemon table-cloths, the lemon net decorating the windows, the pale peach of the table lamp-shades, the thin smokiness of the air drifting from logs in the large fireplace, and down below, outside the tall windows, the studied prettiness of the

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terrace thick with small shrubs and operatic lamp-posts, all designed to remind the customer that Van Gogh had painted the scene.

"But you told me you didn't know it." Pierre sounded faintly aggravated.

"Did I?" I was hardly interested.

"Yes." He was determined to make an issue of the truth.

"Does it matter?" I asked, because I remembered how indeed such small details could matter, although in this case Pierre could barely care whether or not I lied to him about a restaurant.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Women always lie, especially about small things." He sounded tired, as though he too remembered how possible it was to lie about the unremarkable details.

"Do they? What about and why?" I asked, although I knew exactly the index to such a subject and why and how it was compiled.

He decided to generalize. "They lie because lies add to their mysteriousness." It was in a way a small insult.

"Very well," I said. "I shall not lie to you. I shan't lie because I have no wish to appear mysterious. I shall not lie although there may possibly be questions which I will not answer. And you? Do you never lie?"

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"All my lies are constructive." He almost purred. I let him be for a few minutes while he ordered our meal.

"What nonsense!" I lit a cigarette because somehow I sensed that my smoking at that moment would irritate him.

He sniffed. "Always smoking. It's a sign of frustration."

"Pierre," I said. "If you are not going to be more yourself and less a tripper's idea of a Frenchman I think I shall eat my dinner and then leave you."

"I could," he murmured conversationally, "fall in love with you."

"It is, I assure you, utterly unnecessary. Now tell me, Pierre, what do you lie about?"

"I rarely lie in fact." His tone was morose.

"Do you know," I touched his hand. "Neither do I as a rule. It has of course been most disillusioning. Have you not found truth was too exhausting?"

"You're being clever. Tell me when were you here last?"

"About ten months ago. Yes, about ten months." My offhand tone suggested that I had some difficulty in remembering exactly how many months it was, since I had last sat in the Closerie des Lilas.

"You were happy here?"

I wanted to say yes, but I could not, because if I

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had said yes, I should have had to think too carefully, and I could hardly say no, when I knew how once this tinsel-like restaurant had held a glory for me.

"I suppose," he said, "you are suffering from an unhappy love affair. Most women are until another lover comes along."

I laughed. "Pierre," I said. "I think I shall adopt you if only because you say everything that one expects you to. How have you acquired this perfect control of conversation? Is it a habit or could it be hereditary?"

"Well," his curious mouth smiled. "You must understand that I am a trained man. Almost a scientist although not quite. Biochemists are not too highly rated. Nevertheless I enjoy a certain advantage over other men such as bankers, grocers and writers for instance. I am equipped to anticipate the logical reactions. Automatically I am able to tick off the preliminaries. We call it checking. You are therefore dealing with a skilled man. Between you and me it is essential that we begin with the generalizations. Now if you'll concede that I am well acquainted with them perhaps we can dispense with them altogether?"

"I must take it that I am dealing with an unusual man?"

"If you like we will agree that both of us are

unusual people and then we shall feel quite pleased with each other. Here we have an unusual man and an unusual woman with no lies between us and possibly many unanswered questions. Why are we so unusual? What do you think makes us so outstanding?"

"Our lack of knowledge," I said warily.

"Of each other or of the world?" He was smiling.

However what Pierre called the preliminaries were not over. Through each course, both of us gave out a certain ration of the facile exchanges, using these time-servers to fill in the gaps between the mild and unimportant pieces of information which, because we were dining together, we endeavoured to extract from each other.

Possibly it was the brandy as well as the opportunity that produced in me a strong and definite desire for Pierre. Possibly it was the desire already there, in that Closerie des Lilas restaurant, waiting for me to return to it.

A desire so diametrically opposed to my desire for Pierre that to mention it even, is to question its validity, if one assumes that the tenets of reality derive from logic.

There, facing me was Pierre, oddly self-absorbed, yet keenly interested in whatever I might say or do. There he sat, his shoulders slightly hunched, his

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hands holding his brandy goblet, his eyes diffident yet defiantly self-confident. Almost a stranger he was, sitting there with his humour and his trust, a stranger to whom I was indirectly giving a remembered desire. Perhaps it was Pierre's subdued determination which made me extend the remembered desire, made me offer it to him, since he was so evidently ready to receive it. I remember thinking that once I had been warned against the wickedness of waste.

Then Pierre smiled—one of those smiles I was to know so well, which covered his face with an iridescent light like sunshine on a sheet of glass. At the time I was hardly to know how insistently powerful and evocative that smile could be. There, at the Closerie des Lilas restaurant, after dinner with the brandy, Pierre's smile came as a mild visual pleasure to which I decided to give, temporarily, my joy.

"You ask a lot of questions, don't you?" he said.

"It's a habit," I replied, thinking how little you know, my amiable stranger, what a pernicious habit with me these meticulous questions are. I liked him because he replied as neatly as he was able, without hesitation or resentment, although I realised that his lack of guile, in this respect, merely sprang from an instinctive knowledge that my questions were

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casual rather than personal. He could hardly know how inexpressibly delicious it was for me to follow question with question, with no particular purpose behind each one, and with no especial wish to receive any answers.

On leaving the restaurant we walked along the boulevard St. Michel, past the Luxembourg Gardens, towards St. Germain des Prés. We became like many other couples devoted to the impulsion of our steps on the pavement, eyes pleasantly glazed by the lights of passing cars, bodies alert and responsive to the redolence of the decaying blossom on the trees.

I remember many things about that late evening stroll, but I remember most the warm June night air on my face, remember it as I might an old ballad, nostalgic and grievous, stirring the heart, distressing the mind. As I walked along with Pierre's hand on my arm, past the Luxembourg Gardens at night, I stopped and peered in beyond the railings. There was little to be seen except the dim outline of the trees and a hint of statuary.

Pierre's hand on my arm was firmly comforting, not light as another hand had once been. Pierre's hand told me he would not go unless I asked him to, whereas that other touch had been almost too unbearably migrant, although at the time I had known it would be with me all my life, and I stood

quite still, eyes half-closed, and felt it again as I felt the June night air on my face.

"Hold me tight," I said, as Pierre's arms closed about me. "Hold me tight," I said, although I am not in the habit of allowing comparative strangers to hold me in the street. I hoped his hardness would protect me from the night air.

"Are you tired?" His voice was kind.

I broke away from him, my body light and relaxed again and able to choose. An old gaiety propelled my limbs, bringing with it a flippancy and a light-hearted rashness.

"How I love Paris." I tightened my hold on Pierre's arm; now it was I who was leading both of us. "Once I planned to live here. Oh for a few months. Some small apartment or studio with flowers on the balcony."

"You must come and see where I live," Pierre said. "There aren't any flowers, no balcony, but there's a courtyard which will appeal to you."

"You're taking it for granted." It was less a question than a statement.

"I'm inviting you to come." He was equally matter of fact.

Then, of course, I could have stopped the whole business. Then it was possible to cross off the meeting with Pierre as so much extraneous detail to my

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first day in Paris. It would have been simple to have thanked him for the drinks, the dinner, the company, the light-heartedness of it all, and to have said good-bye, or rather to have bidden him '*au revoir*', knowing that another meeting was not unavoidable.

I sensed the hesitation in myself, recognized it as a trained reaction, instinctively rather than formally trained, simply because it was my habit to consider myself as part of a particular background. Yet, there I was in Paris, as I had planned, completely divorced from any background, and therefore quite independently myself, not even responsible to those who did not wish me to be responsible to them. It became a simple issue of responding to Pierre to whom already I obliquely responded.

"I want you to come," Pierre said.

I looked at him. His face was serious.

"It could be very simple," he said.

I will dispense with the beginning, since what was between Pierre and me had no proper beginning, if only because a beginning is some moment of time at which one looks back sentimentally, enviously; some climax which necessarily, almost inevitably,

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produces an end. No beginning and no end—merely Pierre and I—and how somehow it was, at some time, to be remembered if remembered, as something that was whole and yet only part of some other sphere of experience. Admittedly there is something most enticing about a beginning, particularly about the remembrance of it. At such and such a time, one says, from such and such a step, one says; thus is reality created from the juxtaposition of days, nights, weeks, months and years, when all the time there is really no beginning at all, only certain obvious reflexes resulting from other obvious reflexes.

Often the matter of this beginning is too trivial, too slight, to match the resultant passion and the resultant fury. Yet so habit-groomed are we, that we cling to this idea of a beginning as to some childish notion of an inevitable and just progression of a co-ordinated scheme. It is important, we say, it has to be important; there is, at all times, a need for justification. A lovely lush idea this notion of a beginning, some sweetmeat to suck when the mouth is dry. Pallid comforter to all our woes is a tenderhearted, eager-sensed beginning, an airy-fairy frivolity of this and that; carefully hoarded minutes, some small time most furtively tended, most presumptuously endowed as something more

fixed than reality, something more striking than experience.

We move on, move away from the beginning, and like dismayed parents, we grumble when what we create does not follow entirely in our tracks, nor grow into the swan we dreamt about. 'Childhood is the kingdom' we say as we huddle round in circles, and speak of what it was like when it was merely an unshaped promise of the beautiful and the rare, and when for a season it lay content, unquestioning, within our dominance. Gradually from idolic worship we are pushed towards the small whimper and the nagging tongue, as days and nights assume their share of propulsion, and circumstances beyond our own add to the direction, and other people contribute to establish separate identities. 'It was not like this then,' we say. Blindly we turn to that beginning to find this talisman no longer a protection against the changing climate.

Therefore, because I know so well the dangerous misery of such beginnings, I will dispense with the daily bread of my beginning with Pierre, although I know how sweet such unravellings can be.

Since I am to dispense with the chronological sequence of my meetings with Pierre, I must give Pierre to you as an entirety, not discover or relate him slowly as I would some more enduring experi-

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ence. I must try and describe him, because in writing about him I will probably confuse him with my own introspection, and you will get no clear idea of him at all, and might even wonder whether or not he existed.

In many ways the description is simple, because I need only say to myself 'Yes, that is what he is like,' and there he is, before me, unadorned and unlamented. Had there been only love, the matter would be more intricate, and my visual image would consist of a series of contradictory sharpnesses.

There he is, as you and I could no doubt find him now, should we bother to seek him out. I might say that Pierre's physical impression is roughly, if unobtrusively, masculine, the kind of man I would not usually remember. At first, Pierre appears to fit too much into a general pattern of male escorts, assets to a dinner party, the kind of man able to guide one in a theatre without any undue flourish. At first he appears like that, with his faintly athletic carriage, and when he moves away, one notices how easily he holds himself, and it is therefore doubly surprising to discover in that disciplined walk a slight slouch, which is more occasional than habitual, more indicative of some nervous reaction. This slouch, which is almost imperceptible, is symptomatic of a number of small physical individualities

which distinguish Pierre among so many other men who might be Pierre.

Therefore when I want to remember Pierre, Pierre walking along a street, Pierre rising from a café chair to greet me, Pierre reading a newspaper, Pierre buying flowers, Pierre shaving or brushing his hair, Pierre pulling off his shoes, Pierre lying on the bed—when I want to remember Pierre as some physical shape I shall recognize immediately I must think of the small physical individualities.

There are no outstanding lines or gestures, no pronounced movement of head or hand, no startling feature to arrest the attention. Merely an accumulation of small details which are recognizable because they are known, and which would not attract immediate attention nor remain in the mind as some idiosyncratic peculiarity by which, often, the stranger impresses himself upon the casual passer-by.

It is this near-to anonymity which attracted me to Pierre, attracted perhaps because previously I had been so powerfully influenced, and consequently directed, by a combination of physical affirmations. It was refreshing to temporise within the negative attributes, the minor symbols of personality. I had come to Paris to escape from the characteristic, and found in Pierre the typical. The characteristic is

something which drives many beside myself to frenzy simply because there is nothing else like it. At first, there was a mellow kind of irony in my thinking how far from one particular individuality I had moved to Pierre. One was the stimulant, the other the sedative. Inevitably the characteristic is the more interesting, the more dramatic, the breeding-ground for climax, decision, action, and inevitably the easier to remember, to describe.

Indeed, easy it is for the sharper profile to remain in the mind. Easy to recall the effortless grace and presumption of a finely-boned cheek, the imperious acquisitiveness of a nose drawn from a wide slanted brow, set hard like granite above the thin mobile cruelty of an upper lip. Indeed it is easy to remember the delicate line of enquiry, secrecy and desperation, all held together by a common underlying ruthlessness. The impact of such a face would, totally, be almost brutal, if it were not for an archaic tenderness about the lower lip, and some lively humour of temperament and expression. The impact would, totally, be nerve-wracking, if it were not superficially out-ranged by the brilliance of outrageously deep-set and almost fantastically large eyes. Such eyes overwhelmed a face, detracted from the autocratic nose, guarded the Machiavellian discipline of the thin upper lip. Even the wariest

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among us have been known to submit to such eyes, and when confronted by the profile, many have realised it was too late for anchoring within a safer harbour. It was just such a combination of features I had voluntarily left behind me in London.

I am not among the wariest of the world. Observer though I may be, I am simultaneously a participator, and therefore wreck myself while I assess the damage. Thus, unencouraged, I dedicate myself to the rare, knowing how often the rare is akin to the damned, and having spent myself utterly upon what is so unmitigatedly characteristic, I am left with no immediate urgency to give to the typical. Precisely that kind of visual memory had, if only because of an obstinate and vigorous reaction, led me directly and indirectly to the security of Pierre's unobtrusive and typical features.

To Paris I had come, having dissipated my urgency, being then a creature curiously alien to all provocation and passion, having torn love from me as I might throw off a burning garment. Like some convalescent, still ill-adjusted, I accepted Paris and Pierre. Paris was necessary to me if only because, having for so long lived with the immeasurably sensual, I could hardly breathe without it, and the sensuality of a city does not over-exhaust already exhausted nerves.

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Pierre, as a physical entity, was some matter I was not temperamentally compelled to endow with my perpetual attention. In that accumulation of small physical details which proclaimed Pierre's special identity, there was comfort since there was no danger. Steady always was my visual reaction to Pierre; even his grey eyes, wide and faintly oblique, held no power to distress. Therefore, almost joyously, I can note what gave him his recognizable typicality. The thick, untidy eyebrows, the faint outline of a small scar wrinkling the right corner of his mouth into a wiser line than was normal to the firm broadish lips; the impression of a dimple in a squarish chin, a smudge of light no more. Such imprints were almost camouflaged within his well-shaped symmetrical head. Oh, he had his tricks, had Pierre, with his quick way of turning to face one, bringing the charming smile of his grey eyes to the exact level of one's own, leaving one faintly put out by the unexpectedness of his masculine curiosity and assumption. Then, there were his hands, remarkably attractive as often intelligent men's are, combining sensitivity and solidity within the slightly tapered line of the fingers.

Perhaps I should mention that Pierre was married. If I appear to take this rather casually it is because the married part of Pierre has nothing to do with

my Pierre. On his finger he wore the golden band by which continental men denote their married status and responsibility. I noticed it first at the Closerie des Lilas.

"Yes," Pierre said, acknowledging my glance, "seven years ago."

"Any children?" I asked.

"One girl," he replied. "Do you mind about my being married?"

"Why should I, if you don't?" It was the only kind of answer I could give.

I mention this fact of Pierre being married not to produce any moral reaction either for or against, but merely to give as near accurate an impression of Pierre as any stranger might receive when glancing casually in his direction. A quick impression produced a conviction of solidity, a solidity of habit-forming conventions which seven years of marriage had given Pierre, and which inevitably added some kind of recognizable physical quality to his appearance. The impression was deceptive if only because the solidity itself was a kind of concealment, a kind of evasion; those seven years of marriage formed certain actual barriers, provided an inconspicuous façade. A pleasant man with responsibilities, steady, reliable, hardly the victim of temperamental irascibility—such would be the general verdict. How I

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envied Pierre for physically matching a conventional conception of average respectability.

Possibly what appealed to me in the beginning about Pierre was the quixotic flavour of the physical contrast between Pierre and myself. It was deliciously absurd, if only because it was so unusual as to be almost arresting. There was Pierre, a soberly masculine entity, whom strangers could easily place, and there I was, who always attract either immediate dislike or immediate interest.

People make up their minds about me, which is as disadvantageous as it is advantageous a reaction, and against which I occasionally rebel, but which I do not wholly resent since I prefer to establish a definite relationship straight away. I reason, I can pursue without too much waste of time any action I intend. Admittedly, I am equally quick with my own first impressions, although I am quite ready to change the key should I discover a different mood. All this makes me not so much striking as noticeable, a fact I incline to veer away from, particularly when depressed or suffering from wounded pride. Then I resent the quick assessment and the snap judgment which, in lighter moods, I can at least view with some humour and sympathy. All this is so evidently expressed in my physical make-up.

My face is long and narrow and definitely boned.

My movements sharply indicate my moods, even my silence is revealing, and my voice too easily betrays either my joy or my anxiety. Physically I am almost unprotected, in so far that no bone, muscle or line in me has mastered even the elementary grammar of concealment. Consequently I am ever at a disadvantage, slanted as I am at the edge of personal betrayal. It is so remarkably easy for strangers to assess my temperamental distinctions because, to some extent, their judgments will be right because my features, gestures, and voice proclaim certain temperamental tendencies. I mention this not for any self-dramatisation, but merely to stress the sharp contrast between Pierre and myself.

I am almost humorously aware of this absurd contrast when I think about Pierre and me sitting together in a café, waiting to cross a traffic-ridden street, or saying good-bye to each other. Often I became my own *doppelgänger* and watched our meetings and farewells, feeling much as a chemist might who, irresponsibly, mixes two quite unrelated quantities.

"Professionally," I once asked Pierre, "does this not seem impossible to you?"

"Well . . ." he leant over me, "there are laws, very serviceable."

"No, no. I'm interested." I held one of his

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fingers. "This you and me. Surely it's all wrong? Quite basically impossible? Wouldn't you say? I mean—speaking as a biochemist?"

"We draw no conclusions. We merely work with the evidence." He kissed my finger which held his.

"But shouldn't we clash or something? Explode? Blow ourselves up? I mean you and me? So different in quantity. Aren't we asking for trouble?"

"You're my missing factor. Lab's closed now. This is life—crude and empirical? Let's call it the vital principle. Take it or leave it?"

"Think I've taken it somehow," I murmured.

"More coming up. Ready?" He smiled as he came closer.

I grew used to Pierre because I am the kind of person who likes someone to be near, someone to walk with, talk with and just be with, and also perhaps because I am used to being with someone. Possibly that is why I did not really notice how frequently we met, nor how closely we were associated, since personal intimacy has been so much part of my life, that without it, I doubt whether I

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could walk along a street alone, although of course, I have often walked alone along a number of streets, but ever with the knowledge that I was part of two people, though I might live on my own for an hour or a day or a week or a month even. Nevertheless I have mostly lived with more than myself. Often I have wondered what it would be like to live alone again, as surely I must have done at some time; perhaps when I was very young or perhaps when I was still young. Definitely there was some time when I must surely have lived by myself.

During these thirty odd years of life from the time of my birth, I have acquired the evolutionary habit of someone being not only complementary, but actually necessary to my life. Possibly this necessity, being twofold, holds a kind of progression, since this combination of two strengths, two weaknesses and two personalities, contains some kind of new-found land wherein transmission and interchange can thrive.

I am conscious of the larger purposes and issues of life, since life is so much larger and longer than ever my imagination could visualise and anticipate. Therefore, I am glad, and almost worshipful, that my life has contained this link with continuity, as indeed my living in and about another human being affirms. Thus I am bound to the progression of life,

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being conscious of my lack of isolation. Gladly therefore, I have welcomed this bondage, for in this bondage lies the inevitable evolution, and in some measure, I am saved from retrogression, if only because I acknowledge as a fact the need of fusion.

I have progressed from the common shell with my basic desire for attachment, be it only a question of sexual selection. Moreover this contagious disease of desire also attacks my emotions, my intellect and my imagination. I record my humility and gratitude for that life-force which lifts me from the rocks and ammonites and carries me beyond the dream of Gerontius.

Therefore I was glad of Pierre, whom I took as I would take the weather in a strange country, accepting the lack of familiarity, since I had come to Paris to forget about the familiar items of living.

To Pierre, I gave as much as was left in me to give, and he handled it rather delicately, neither ill-using nor pushing my desire beyond its capacity. When I felt savage and raw, and a crazy lilt rose to the apex of my being, Pierre was correspondingly brutal, and in his brutality I found a certain consolation for the lack of love. And when I cried because tears were the only offering I could bring, he would cover me with his body, contrite and yet proud to have wrung

some kind of pain from me. Then I would wreck his sense of protection and taunt him to further excess, until at last, we would lie, utterly separate from each other on the bed, replete and repulsed and licking our wounds like primitive mammals.

Yet, even at such times, I knew that in us both there was tenderness, although we had not met because of tenderness, and I would turn again to Pi  re and draw him near and, with my hand, attempt, with slow almost whispered caresses, to rub out the dreadful savagery. Once he cried, and I could hardly bear to feel those warmish teardrops fall on my shoulders, if only because I knew the tears were not for me, not even for himself. They were tears for every kind of human relationship—a sort of interest life extracts from the weak and from the strong. At such times it was necessary to use familiar words, to lick over the word of love, to throw it like a handful of flowers upon the table, since it was necessary that someone should be consoled. Such words of love as were then given were common symbols distributed upon the very bed of the seas, distributed carelessly, comforting the lonely and the lost.

Strangely moving was that sequence of incident, from savagery to tears, from tears to love, and from love to memories and half-memories.

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Pierre was sentimental, which is not unusual, since we are most of us attached by sentiment to those people and places which contain our security, and to most of us the home and the family represent the first security, and often many of us fail to find this security again, if only because, within the parental sphere, it was too embracing.

I have escaped from such a criterion of safety, and am fortunate in that my childhood was divorced from the crippling blood-ties of the parental hearth. For me there has never been the homestead of retreats. At best, it was a makeshift affair of four walls, and a promiscuous parentage which offered no steadiness or burial ground. I have lacked therefore the elemental cavern to which I might have returned from my hunting and my despair; wherein I might have stored my trophies, and where I might have gone barefooted and despoiled, knowing that, within that primeval captivity, I could have slept undisturbed by the hunter.

I have lacked all that and yet I have gained, because, consequently, it has become vital that within my limited scope of activity, I should ultimately triumph, since I could not afford to be conquered beyond retrieve. I have gained in so far that I am able to choose my own comforters and to follow, unimpinged by traditional loyalty, a multi-

tude of investigations, and can, if I wish, choose each and every one for as long as I desire to dedicate my trust to my chosen ones.

Thus I belong to the dispossessed, who belong to all men since all men seek absolution through desolation and solitude, and it is, perhaps, this vagrant quality, an essential streak of my being, which attracts to me the faithful kinsmen. Tribeless, I invite them to participate in the adventure of loneliness. They come to me with their security, knowing they can retreat from the nomad travelling of my way, and I welcome and offer my hospitality as did the ancient kings and the ancient shepherds to those who were bound from one point to another. While they are with me, those whom I choose to accompany me across the deserts, savannahs and scented forests of life, are given my joy. I give it as some might give a talisman, to guard them against the torments of knowledge so that when, eventually, they reach their country, they should bear within their hearts a traveller's tale of how once they saw a star streak across the sky for their especial delight.

When Pierre, exhausted by savagery, spoke of his childhood, I felt cold inside and yet able to receive the tokens he scattered upon the tousled bed. Something in me cried—dear God was it possible, that

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within my arms, I held a male child straining to be rid of the adult passions which tears and circumstances had bred.

"And what did you do," I asked, "when your aunt sent you to bed during the afternoons?"

This story concerned part of a summer holiday which Pierre spent with a tyrannical aunt who was firmly convinced that the young outran their strength during the morning and needed time during the afternoon to regain it; therefore every afternoon, for two hours, Pierre was sent to lie on his bed in a room shuttered against the sun.

"I never dared open the shutters," he said. "I used to lie there and listen to the silence of the house. Everyone slept from two to four. I would climb the highest mountain in the world and single-handed subdue the wildest Tibetan tribe."

And in my arms this conqueror lay, choosing to waste the afternoon, while outside the traffic hummed and lent a strange hilarity to our nakedness.

Remembering those youthful conquests, his body would become less lax, more vibrantly self-assertive, and because I did not wish to be used merely associatively, I drew back and mocked.

Then he would question me as all lovers do at some time. Then he would invite the lies which such questioning habitually produces, and for his

especial benefit I would bring out all the transmutations of former loves, challenging his invincibility and skill. I spoke about those others, condensing the community into an entirety, gathering grace from one, virtuosity from another, and magic from a third. I offered the very element of experience as though it were one high deed of one man's accomplishment and daring, and Pierre listening to my traveller's tale strove not so much to startle me with his perfection, as to vie with the sturdiest and most valient of champions. It was at their feet that he placed his achievement, it was their response which he required, it was their astonishment which he sought. He was in love with the bravest, the mightiest and the best. It was an execution which I understood since I had myself performed it, and now, that I was spectator, I watched the performance almost as a referee, knowing exactly when to award the points.

"Are you always so satisfactory?" I asked, destroying in some degree his confidence.

Then he surprised me.

"Darling," he said, "it's you who are so very satisfactory."

Inside me I wept, because these were words I had longed to hear, and now they came from a stranger whom I would not miss if he should go out of my

life entirely. I wept, because it did not matter weeping with Pierre since from him I could never suffer humiliation, and I should have found it comparatively easy to have risen from the bed and dressed and gone away, with little injury to my pride if he had not found me satisfactory.

"It's nothing, nothing," I said. "Nothing and everything. But not you."

"Someone else?" His voice was sweet, almost like a friend.

"There is always someone else somewhere." I could not have him participate, even indirectly.

"And you? Isn't there someone else?" I questioned him.

"Yes, in a way there is, but a different way."

"How different?"

"Part of my life I suppose."

We were both silent for a while, because we knew how intimately bound we both were to part of our lives.

"But apart from that?" I felt a need of questioning. "Surely others?"

"Yes. Others. Now and then there are others."

"Am I one of them?"

"Yes. Yes, you're one of them. A strange one, still one of them. We know that, don't we? I'm the same to you."

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"In a way you are. Only in a way." I was not giving even this.

"Tell me," he was oddly solemn. "What else in your life?"

I laughed, because there was so much else of which I had dispossessed myself, by which I was still perplexed.

"Why am I so different?" I asked the next question.

"You don't want love and yet you accept everything I give."

"Do you give love?" I enjoyed asking.

"Would you want it?"

"No." I knew when I was defeated.

I leant over him as though I were a man and he was a woman, and I looked at him and let my hand explore the bone and flesh and hair of him, and as I touched him, touched him as though I was taking notes for future reference, I felt under my hand and under his particular hardness another skin, smoother, softer, more pliable.

How seldom we admit the remembrance of another passion when lying on someone else's bed. How furtively the memory creeps upon our consciousness—a sneak, a peeping Tom pertly attired in previous experience, most wickedly calculating, casting respective values at the most inopportune moments. How we hasten to pit actuality against

the past, ever fearing that if we allow the memory to persist, the lover of the moment will question the identity of the third bedfellow.

‘What lies between us?’ is the unspoken question, which we must, at all costs, drive out of the room, if only because we were taught, when young, certain lessons in common politeness which decree that a man’s natural pride must not be shamed. Thus are we bred and bound to the ethical laws of hypocrisy, and no conventions challenge us as we turn to the lover of the moment with a renewed passion in our body and a bolder protestation on our lips.

Once I was tempted to unmask that third bedfellow, tempted to introduce Pierre to what I could remember so clearly as my hands touched him, responding to his urgency which appeared so presumptuously independent of all previous experience.

“Shall I?” I said, looking at him, and as I spoke, I realised that Pierre was not listening. Unruffled, untouchable, he felt only that I was as single-minded in my sensuality as he was.

Yet surely he could match my memories with his own? He could do so as decisively as I could, and yet he chose to disconnect himself entirely from sensuality before me, simply because he assumed I was likewise dedicated to the moment.

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Fortunate he was, as relaxed and unknowing, he looked at me without questioning, merely because I had given him my body, although life held other desires for me.

Yet, I thought as I looked at him, I have played fair, if such childish terms could appropriately describe my participation in our mutually spontaneous passion. It was all a matter of time. This was Pierre's time of isolation, and my time of indirect vulnerability to past experience.

How often, I wondered, had I lain as he then was, bountifully replete with loving, while into another's range of consciousness came some half-memory which had nothing whatever to do with me? Did it then feel like this, I wondered? And was there no shame for my unsuspecting shame?

Would Pierre one day remember me on a similar occasion when I belonged to his past experience? And I? Would I remember him? Would I, because of him, shame someone else as I was, that day, shaming him? Viewed in this way, the guilt becomes universal and almost commonplace, if only because there is simply no way in which we can cope with all experience.

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It was a strange place where Pierre lived, or should I say where Pierre resided because, as I afterwards discovered, those curiously insecure rooms were merely used, not lived in.

If you were standing outside the Louvre and wished to find Pierre, and it was a sunny afternoon and you felt a walk would enhance your day, you would turn towards the river. It would not matter which of the three nearest bridges you crossed because all, eventually, led to Pierre. Perhaps if you visited him often and were a stranger to Paris, you would cross each bridge in turn, because from every bridge over the Seine you get a different view of the city; thus you reap several harvests simply because you take the trouble to add to your visual memory.

From the pont de Solferino you can see the gare d'Orsay and the taxi rank, and you feel yourself nearer to the pont de la Concorde and the Tuileries, and ugly though you might find the gare d'Orsay, absurdly ornate and pretentious, you would surely feel that it is not altogether dismissible, since about its solemnity there is a kind of desolation and a feeling of being left out of the general traffic of life.

If, however, you are not one of those whose natural kindness incline them to consider the *déclassé* of this world, you would doubtless prefer to

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experience the excitement of crossing the Pont-Neuf if only to incline your head before the statue of Henry IV and to enjoy the sensation of walking on an island within a city. Moving away from Henry IV to the left flank of the bridge, you will become integrated within the graciousness of the île de la Cité, and perhaps break the purpose of your walk, which was to cross the Seine to see Pierre, and stroll, nostrils alertly receptive, either down the quai de l'Horloge or along the quai des Orfèvres, because you could hardly resist a closer acquaintance with the lovely ancient grey houses, aristocratic testimonials to past splendour, nostalgic and immeasurably enchantable survivors of centuries which we can only speculate about. Many minutes and many hours you can waste loitering in and about those sweetly archaic quais and streets, which beckon as did the sirens to Ulysses, tempting the sturdiest and most single-minded traveller to stray from the broad thoroughfare. And as you stroll past that immeasurably memorable grey stone of the île de la Cité, you might, as I did, wonder why you were so set upon reaching those rooms where Pierre might be found. You might wonder, as I did, and perhaps, as I did, you would be struck by a similarity between the grey stone of those shuttered houses, and the man who lived across the river. Surely, beneath those

straight dark lashes the keenly inquisitive and appreciative grey of Pierre's eyes would remind and link the viewer to the grey of those ancient houses, and because a fanciful trick of light might link one to the other, link the man and the rock, because of this you might, as I did, turn and almost run back to the Pont-Neuf and the way to Pierre. Nevertheless, once near the Pont-Neuf, and even supposing you did waste much of the afternoon nosing your way around the Palais de Justice and were perhaps tempted to reach the boundary of Nôtre Dame, eventually you would be on your way to Pierre, because, as I have said, all bridges across the Seine lead to Pierre.

But possibly, standing as I did on the right bank of Paris, just beyond the palais du Louvre, you might, as I did, not hesitate in your direction, and aim straight across the river, by way of the pont des Arts, simply because you knew it was the quickest way to Pierre.

Once across the pont des Arts, you will find yourself in what is known as the sixth *quartier* of Paris. A rickety rectangle of streets springing forth like thin sturdy branches of a flowering shrub from its parent root, the Luxembourg Gardens. A rectangle walled in by four broad lanes, the rue de Rennes and the boulevards of Montparnasse, St. Michel and

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St. Germain. A city in itself, idiosyncratic and esoteric, attracting the hybrid and the migrant, offering the palm tree, the mirage and the pitiless sand. Those who dwell therein are mostly transitory in their hibernation and preoccupation, coming as they do from every city and village of the world, bringing ardency, curiosity and discontent, leaving behind a sense of youth and decay and many unfulfilled dreams.

And any one of those narrow streets, the rue Bonaparte, the rue de Seine, the rue Mazarine, will lead you to Pierre, because once having crossed the pont des Arts and deserted the wide quai-side for the inner recesses of this hive of students, exhibitionists, university professors, curates and negroes, and of those who dwell in marble halls and those who waste their lives away in glasses of Pernod, you are immediately on your own ground, since this is an area which Paris leases to the tormented and the tormentors.

Here you can waste your life or waste the lives of others, here you can use time or be used by it, here you can come with your vanity and your humility, and no one will care, although all will question, and you can either notice or forget. Here you will find what you might bring, here you will lose what you cannot keep, here you must shelter within bound-

daries others have cast aside or merely slipped away from. If you are among the inflexible of this world you can ruminate at will and not be altered in the slightest, or remain aware that strangers are closing in on you, since you can leave whenever you will.

I was glad that it was among such a multitude of complexities and simplicities that Pierre was to be found, since the deciduous nature of this district matched the desire which led me to the heavily carved outer wooden door through which I entered the courtyard.

A small, rather dirty, smelly courtyard, a travesty of what such courtyards once were. Silent, and yet containing an undertone of noise, whether of life in the street behind the wooden door, or of life within the house, I cannot tell, nor did I bother to distinguish sound from sound. Some chipped stone urns wherein someone, possibly the caretaker, had planted a few geraniums, of which now remained only one or two hardier stems, indicated that the original aspect of this courtyard had been decorative. These ungainly lumps of stone and yellowing plants matched the untidiness of the uneven paving. I was glad it was so unloved, so uncared for, because I did not wish to be tricked by even the shadow of what might be beautiful, if only because I had wrestled with beauty like Jacob with the angel.

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Then, unenchanted as I was by the glory of life, I walked across that courtyard, my mouth arid, my body bruised by previous encounters, to mount the stairs leading to where I knew Pierre lived. I walked towards the stairs, knowing as I passed the caretaker's door, that her eyes would brand the purpose of my visit into some kind of shame.

Now that Pierre is someone whose life moves away from mine, I can remember how it was when I crossed the courtyard, braved the caretaker, as Orpheus did Cerberus, mounted the stairs, and opened the door on the first floor where living-room joined bedroom and where, on one of my later visits, I found, not Pierre, but James.

How can I describe James who is so easy to describe because he is so recognizable with his large tall limbs, and his slack strength waiting to subdue. About James it is necessary to be accurate because he himself was, and is still, I suppose, so very certain a person, with his watchful hunter's flexibility, able to stop or spring forward as demanded progression towards the kill.

"Hallo," he said. "I was told you might come." He sounded almost too matter of fact. There was a kind of danger. "I'm Pierre's landlord."

I nodded. "Yes, I know. Pierre told me about you." I remembered the elusive landlord of this

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apartment; a Canadian, Pierre had said, a journalist of some kind whose work took him away for indefinite periods and who was likely to return at the most inconvenient moments.

"Aren't these Pierre's rooms?" I decided to be rude.

"Guess so," he paused and looked at me. "Don't you like them?"

I could have slapped his face then and there.

"Interesting," he remarked, and handed me a drink.

"Gin," I snapped. "I never drink gin." Nevertheless I swallowed it quickly.

"Well, sit down. I never rape, ducky." He poured me out some more gin.

"What is it about Pierre?" he asked. "Such an ordinary chap. You should know." He waved my protestations aside. "Look, ducky, I'm no ass's bum. Pierre's not talkative, but I know about you. Flowers, look . . ." He waved towards the roses I had brought on my last visit. "Not Pierre's style."

"I like flowers." I decided it was time to assert myself against this man. Besides he provoked in me all the anger I had left behind in London. "Either you go or I do," I said.

He rose from his chair, coming towards me as I stood with my back against the window, waiting for

him to come towards me as I knew he would.

"Relax, ducky, relax. I know all about you," he said.

He pulled one of the roses out of the vase and threw it at me. "There! Peace-offering. Let's not get mixed up. I'm an odd bloke and you're odd too, so we shouldn't quarrel. Should we?"

Instinctively I caught the rose and held it tightly, glaring at James who appeared so large in the room which for me had only previously held Pierre.

"Tell you about myself, shall I? O.K. I will. Might as well listen, nothing else to do. Have you? What are you running away from? I'm a simple chap. Money doesn't bother me. Doesn't bother you either. Does it? Women? Oh, they bother me. D'you know I never had a woman until I was nineteen? Queer, don't you think? But still I was rather lucky. First one I had knew all about it—very skilled. There was nothing she didn't know. Interested? After that I knew everything. Believe me? There's one woman with some other man now—money, you know—money it was. But, Christ, he could never make love as I did. I'm not bad you know. In fact, ducky, I'm bloody good."

As he spoke I realised that this man was like the acid in my soul, that he was the sordidness to which I would now and then abandon myself, particularly

when the fury in me was rising to the very pitch of madness, and only because somewhere in the world there was someone I was betraying.

"Now, go on, tell me you're not interested," James said.

"I get it," I was equal to his kind of talk. "You're good, you're better than anyone. A super pin-up boy. And after that?" I let my eyes flick slowly over him as though I were a man viewing a prostitute's potentialities.

"Not bad, is it?" He grinned as he spoke.

I laughed, and that was a mistake, because afterwards it gave James the opportunity perpetually to assume that we knew all about each other, which implied that he knew all about me.

"After that? Well, I'm curious, and that's a good thing to be. You should know. You're curious too. When I stop being curious about people, why they are, what they are, and why they do what they do, well, I guess it's about time for the dirt. And you think so too, don't you?"

He was one of those who is able to assume intimacy with everyone. It is a trick with men like James, a mixture of vanity and kindness; fundamentally men like James want to help, practically they hasten the rot.

"Yes, I think so too, but we mean different things

by curiosity." I did not intend to be drawn wholly into his conspiracy. "I like to know how people think and why. What they do isn't so important."

"Isn't it?" James was almost sharp.

James had scored a blow, a definite unforeseen blow which lashed open the recent scar which, for security's sake, I had placed among the old and barely visible ones. James's words only too clearly reminded me that indeed it mattered very much what people did, especially when their actions broke up the continuity of habit.

"Take it easy," he said, coming up behind me, because I had turned away from him and was staring out of the window, down into the shabby courtyard.

I turned round and looked at him. Gently he reached for my hands, holding them in his own with a tenderness I would not have believed part of him. His hands were boastfully masculine, long square palms, rough muscular fingers, faintly streaked with short fair hair; in his hands I let my own rest, my ring almost touching his signet ring.

"You'd better start to trust me," he said; his washed-out blue eyes were watchful and yet concerned with some promise of care for me.

I have never in my life felt small, yet next to James I had a momentary impression of fragility, feeling I should tumble over but for the support of

his wide hands. His mouth was near my own, an irregular line of arrogance, matching the square depth of his presumptuous chin.

Trust him? Why and for what purpose? A preposterous notion since I needed to trust no one, and certainly have never given any of my past trust to men like James. Yet so insolent and convincing was his remark that I did not laugh outright at such an absurdity, but nodded instead, and leaned my head against his chest.

"We'll get along fine," he was oblivious to the ridiculous. "Pierre," he continued, "won't be back tonight. He's gone home. I'm taking you to dinner."

In many ways James is hardly necessary to my story, superficially he is merely of incidental interest. He is very much like a number of men, very much like strangers met at a party, at a club, at a café, who are remembered because they are so insistent upon thrusting their personalities forward, and who are forgotten because they possess the mannerisms of a certain group of men who, although most extrovertly male, rarely have wives, considering that other men's wives will provide temporary pleasure and distraction, and who can always turn to drink when women are temporarily oblivious of their appeal.

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I mention James, bring him into my tale, not only because in fact he did come into part of it, straying in the margin with his long slack limbs and his invulnerable vanity, but because it is often the quite irrelevant that stresses the point of the matter, and James was that irrelevant detail, the inconsequential encounter which I could almost omit from my story.

For me James acquired a significance which in normal circumstances would have been absolutely impossible. As I tell my story you will realise how James mattered, and how the very fact of James mattering was, to a large extent, my fatality.

Therefore, since I must write about James, let me think about him as he was, and probably still is, and how I found him who had nothing whatever to do with Pierre, nothing whatever to link him with what was behind Pierre in my mind.

James was a gentle man whom circumstances had improvised with, and made necessary that he should appear as someone with a grasp of the callousness of distress which drives most of us, at some time or other, to disreputable and shabby deeds.

He was generous and boastful. Generous with his money and with himself, confident as he was that he could renew the prosperity of both. His material generosity was attractive; a kind of gambler's prodigality. Few borrowed money from James.

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"Don't bother to say it," he would expound. "You know you won't pay me back. Take it now. I never offer twice. I'm no one's fool. I'd rather give than lend. The lender is a sucker. I'm really not interested in money. That's why I always have it."

"Were you ever poor?" I once asked him.

"Christ no!" He laughed and then told me in great detail (James had a minor worship for detail) about his mine-owning father with whom he had quarrelled because he refused to study medicine; and how his uncle gave him money and introductions, and how he never worried because there was always someone he could talk round, at, and into any kind of support he needed. "Someone will always give it to you," stated James. And I knew that at all times about such givings he had always felt perfectly free to refuse, which perhaps explains why, always, he was given exactly what he wanted at the moment.

Before I continue writing about how James came into this affair, I want to stress the relevance and necessity of James to this tale. I want to stress this because I realise that my relationship to James may puzzle many who will consider such an association incompatible with my relationship to Pierre. And quite probably many may not be able to link me to James, and very much mistaken they will be because

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James, if you think about the James I describe, can be linked to almost anyone finding herself in a situation such as the one with which this tale is concerned. Quite simply I want to state that James is consistently appropriate to this story as I am, the narrator. He not only matches it, but in fact—as I have already stated—he indirectly consolidates a number of possibilities.

I knew at once that James was an important factor, although in the beginning my knowledge was merely anticipation. James took me to dinner following our first meeting, talking all the time about himself. He drove me back to my hotel, saying as he left me that I must do the talking the next time. I felt vaguely uneasy, although I dismissed this as tiredness; a mild feeling of irritation at being involved, however remotely, with a man like James.

I was not entirely surprised to find James sitting with Pierre when I went to Weber's at the appointed hour the next day. James bought a round of drinks and then left. During the evening of that same day, as Pierre and I lingered over our after-dinner coffee, James turned up again. "Hallo," he said, making his participation seem easy and natural.

Then, suddenly James became part of us. At first, he would stay with us only a short time; time enough to amuse and irritate. Then he began taking

us both to dinner, which meant that the whole evening was spent with James; spent with a watchful James who would leave abruptly, disappear as a cat might into the dark night.

Once, when I was with Pierre and we both thought we were alone in the apartment, we heard a soft but definite clanking noise of a typewriter being used in the next room. Illogically I was furious. James, of course, had every right to work in his own room, and it was long past midnight. I insisted on Pierre remaining where he was when I left. I knew only too well I should find, as I did find, the door of James's room open; and should see, as I did see, a grinning James, banging away on his typewriter and looking towards the door. He waved a hand at me. I did not wave back.

James began to get on my nerves. "Do I worry you?" he asked. I knew better than to reply.

Soon after that James went away for a couple of days. I missed his obliquely irritating manner. When he returned I was almost pleased to see him. I realised he belonged to the situation.

Moreover I accepted James as part of the situation. I accepted the reality of this man who was quite different from Pierre simply because I am, oddly enough, the kind of person who is able to accept a most unlikely set of contradictions. I can im-

mediately adapt myself which may possibly indicate instability, and which also indicates the kind of person I am. Ever since I was a child I have been used to constantly changing backgrounds, and have inevitably acquired a certain facility for environmental readjustments, which has enabled me, when older, intuitively to settle myself within whichever group circumstances lead me to. I possess no traditional reserve using first my instinct rather than my judgment, although happily I attract change which ensures me that I am never stuck with only the undesirables of this world.

Admittedly this facility is a kind of emotional prostitution, and often my more critical friends express horror listening to me answering the stranger to my world in terms which I would not normally use.

James of course is not the kind of man whom I habitually enter into acquaintanceship with, but finding myself forced into a certain kind of proximity with him I was temperamentally able to accept him in terms which he would understand. I went into James's world when I was with him. I could manage to keep him from coming into mine. Thus with James my speech was a kind of chorus to his words and my emotional focus was limited by his restricted sensuality. When with James I often found myself

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thinking like James, which will perhaps explain why I was able in the first place to accept James without the reservations that others would make.

I was neither drunk nor tired when I decided to try James out. Concerning James, it is impossible to use any euphemistic colloquialism such as 'sleeping with' or even the nearer basic 'bedding with'. With and about James one has to be and indeed must be absolutely factual. About him is that dominant glare of reality—there is never any doubt at all. A consciousness is ever present. One cannot alter or moderate the focus—not in the slightest degree. One cannot, as it were, get away from the indisputable bones of James who stands so nakedly near the bed with such calculating authority. It is no good retreating, and dissimulation is not possible either. One can only wait, wait while an exhilarating coldness spreads over one's body, wait for James. Participation is purely ritualistic. Time becomes a kind of horror nightmare because of longevity, and at the end there is elation if only because of survival.

"You are really brutal," I said.

"Brutal?" James was genuinely astonished.

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"Oh, not sexually brutal. I mean you personally. Everything about you is unerringly brutal." I enjoyed stating this so clearly.

With James it was as I knew it would be. I was merely confirming my anticipation. I knew exactly what to expect, when I sat on the bed and watched him unbutton his waistcoat.

"Never mind about that," James said. "Wasn't I good?"

Good? What was good? I looked at James, *fainéant* and at ease, caring little if at all. Had I ever subconsciously expected good to come from his unimpassioned crudeness?

"Your feet are very ugly." I said as spitefully as I could.

He lit two cigarettes and handed one to me. "Now let's be enemies again, shall we?"

"Have we ever been anything else?" I was aware of something worrying my detachment. Something at the back of my mind was ready to assess and deduce.

"We must do it again." James took my cigarette from me and flipped the ash on a saucer.

"No we won't." I grabbed my cigarette back. "Give me my cigarette-holder and Pierre's dressing-gown."

He grinned and got up from the bed. "Like some coffee?" His harsh voice reached me from across

the room. He threw me the dressing-gown. I half-closed my eyes and yet watched him, as, still naked, he imperturbably busied himself with making coffee.

"I'm an expert," he said, bending down over me, taking my holder and fitting it up with another freshly-lit cigarette. "With coffee—as well."

I did not reply. I was on the edge of discovering what it was at the back of my mind.

"You know," he was there again, squatting on the bed, a cup of steaming coffee in one hand and a small bowl of sugar in the other. "You know you take it too hard. You listen, ducky." He was trying to be gentle. "It's how you give, not what you give. You give all right, but you're too damned contemptuous. Not like that with Pierre, are you?"

"Pierre's not a blasted backwoodsman like you." I matched his crudity.

"Ah!" James rubbed his hairy leg. "Like all women—have to bring love into it. Want to make it nicer. Can't take it neat."

"How'd you get so tough. Train every morning? Do it this way, do it that way, try it another, guerrilla tactics—sweat it out. Nice type, aren't you? You leave me cold." I was forced to such childishness.

James roared. He laughed with every muscle and

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bone in his large overpowering body. His laughter was precisely what I then needed. I sat up and slapped him very hard, forgetting all about the cup of coffee which spilt over both of us.

"Now what did you want to do that for?" James asked, but whether he meant my hitting him or spilling the coffee I don't know, because after that, somehow, but why I cannot explain, we were almost on the edge of friendship.

"How efficient you are." My tone was less amiable than my feelings towards him, as he mopped up the wet liquid and provided me with a clean cup of fresh coffee.

"I have some definite uses," he said, settling himself again by my side and looking at me with a comical smile.

"Yes, yes, you have." I now knew what it was at the back of my mind. I smiled almost tenderly at James.

"Worked it out?" He was amused and almost likeable. Outside it was raining, pelting down as only rain in June can.

"Tell me, ducky," James had become quite non-committal. "What made you think you could take all this on so easily? It's not your background is it?"

No, it was hardly my background, and yet what

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exactly was my background? As I lay there smoking, sipping the hot coffee, with James acquiescent and companionable at my side, I thought about that background.

“Love is hard, isn’t it, for you? Didn’t it work out? That why you’re running away? Because you know you are running away.” James was just the kind of man who said such things.

“No—no.” I tried to be emphatic. “I gave it up.”

“Sweetie!” James laughed and kissed my cheek.

“Oh, James,” I said turning to him, because he was a friend of a kind. “I don’t know. I don’t know. I thought I did. I was so certain. So resolved. So to hell with it all and now . . .”

“And now?”

“Now it might have caught up with me again. James, does it never worry you, this love? This ridiculous love we so often have for someone else?”

“Look at me. Judge for yourself. Me without love. You with love. On whom the odds?”

“It seems we’re both stranded, doesn’t it?” I looked at him lying there, large and quite unashamedly masculine. “I envy you,” I said, and then I laughed because it was all so farcical a situation. James’s nakedness only stressed the ludicrous.

“Why don’t you run back, ducky?” With James such questions were a pleasure, because, throughout

his life, women came to him simply because they were running away from someone else.

"Yes, I envy you. Envy you your dispassionate interest and your ability to take and not to care or remember." So sturdy was my envy of James that I looked at him with a great deal of hatred.

He rose from the bed. I watched him dress. Slow yet decisive movements, measured and casual—pants, trousers, then shirt, each garment handled with a kind of sexual pride as though there was virtue in those masculine testimonials. I thought of how a woman, on such an occasion, might dress; caressingly almost, standing possibly before a looking-glass, savouring the sensuousness of the body's contact with the soft transparent materials. I thought of how a woman might pause, take time off to glance at her shoulders, adjust a strap, touch a bone in her neck, an appreciative gesture of self-approval, and then she might lift her arms slightly, dazzled by her own scent.

"Are you married?" James's question was almost an attack.

"No." I was pleased to upset any pre-conceived notion he might have.

"Irregular liaison, eh?"

"Irregular?" The word pleased me since it was so inept. "Yes, let's call it irregular."

"Where does Pierre fit?"

"Pierre?" I thought about Pierre. I thought about Pierre and I looked at James. I forced myself to the centre of honesty as I admitted fully to myself the result of my afternoon with James.

Yes, James, shaming as was James, James had a definite use.

"Hi—what's the hurry?" James asked as I rushed through the motions of washing, dressing and making up my face.

"I'm going."

"Where we going?" James grinned fatuously.

"I'm going to walk."

"It's raining."

"Then I'll take a taxi."

"Impossible without me. You don't know Parisian taxi-drivers as I do."

"Then I'll sit in a café."

"I'll sit too."

"Don't think I want you."

"Not bad company, you know." His grin was oddly attractive.

We walked out together. Outside, beyond the courtyard, James snapped thumb and forefinger, and there was a taxi. Defeated by circumstances I got in. "Weber's." I gave the destination.

"Tell you a secret?" James bent his head towards

me. "That's the first time I've managed to find a taxi in Paris within half an hour. Now let's be semi-friendly again. Better have a calvados. It'll warm you up."

I looked at the rain, still pelting down, and felt suddenly secure and happy, sitting behind the glass front of Weber's. I pitied those few people who remained outside, under the awning, reading their evening papers. I shivered contentedly. "O.K. Calvados for me."

After the second calvados served with coffee, on James's recommendation, my shivering fit dissolved into a subdued glow, which matched the early summer rain beating down upon the pavement outside.

"It's the wrong way round," I informed James.

"The wrong way round?" James was not as quick as I had supposed.

"Yes," I patiently explained. "Normally—or so one is lead to believe—the drinks come first." I loved this silly notion, and wondered whether whores enjoyed their drinks as much as I was then savouring the bitter warmth of my calvados. "Drinks should always come afterwards." I realised that I was mildly intoxicated.

"Anything you say, ducky." James was completely relaxed.

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I almost loved him then; loved him as I would love a dear friend met suddenly in the rain in the centre of Paris. I was quite pleased with James and prepared to listen to all he had to say about life and his bitter and joyful knowledge of it.

Then, for no apparent reason at all, we were discussing power, the use and abuse of it, and it became urgently necessary that I should, metaphorically, wipe the floor with James who, sprawled back in his chair, piled his war experiences in front of me as mercilessly as the waiter added to our price tickets.

"I am sick to death of masculine heroics," I said, mildly banging my glass on the table. "And," I stopped myself from wagging a finger at James, "don't you dare give me any torture stories because I think they all stink. What in God's name did you fight for? To have a collection of bed-time stories to tell your children or to impress women like me? Let's not clutter up the issue with blood and sweat."

"You're just being conventional," James remarked. "Like all women peace at any cost."

"Were we discussing pacifism? Why bring up that stale chestnut whenever war is condemned? It's a mean trick planned to unsettle your opponent, to humiliate him. Immediately it is he who stands condemned—as a weakling. Let's not mix pacifism

up with war—the white feather symbol guaranteed to intimidate. War and pacifism are both red herrings confusing the issue.”

“What issue, ducky?” James sounded very far away.

“This issue.” I spoke slowly because the calvados was taking its toll of me. “The issue of life and what the hell we do with it, and why we think and what we do with that, and why, in the light of everything I like, love and respect, I sit here drinking with you.”

“Shall I tell you?”

“Yes—you tell me. You tell me.” Ostentatiously I leaned back in my chair mocking his explanatory ability.

“You’re sitting here with me because I’ve paid you a compliment.”

“You’ve paid me a compliment?” I drew myself up, drunkenly aghast.

“I’ve paid you the compliment of taking you out afterwards.” There was a flatness in his tone which rather impressed me.

I smiled. “D’you know, James, I think you’re right,” I said and loved him all over again, as I would love a dear friend met suddenly in the rain in the centre of Paris.

I saw Pierre first. I knew he was there almost before he came in through the café door. I waited

for him before he found us, whom perhaps he was not even intending to find.

"Oh, Pierre," I said, "you look like a Maquisard in that white raincoat."

For a second he was bewildered, and as he stood there, his dark hair wet with rain, nervously pushing one hand through it, I knew he was as glad as I was that we had met then.

"I've just been company," James smiled, and we all laughed and settled down to our evening together. James with us, and Pierre with me, and the new gladness which James, so unwittingly, had launched into acknowledgment. There it was, the new relationship between Pierre and myself, which forced me to admit, after my afternoon with James, that Pierre was not another James, taken merely for curiosity or for pleasure.

Pierre was a man taken entirely for himself; taken because I had chosen him among men. Therefore, taken by selection, Pierre became a kind of love for me, and with James beside both of us, I turned to Pierre and answered love with love, since I knew and he knew we held between us a sort of love which should be protected.

I know, looking back, that it was then that I fell in love with Pierre. Fell in love with him as he came through that door, out of the rain, his hair wet, his

white raincoat wrapped about him like a suit of armour, and however fragmentary a love, it was from that moment that it began.

I can see him now, remember him most from that particular time when, cautiously, he came up to me, looking faintly young—not boyishly nor handsomely young, rather roughly young—and said: “I’ve been thinking about you.”

How exhilarating a bright morning can be after a lover’s quarrel. I was enchanted with the clarity of the sun filling my hotel bedroom, and the luscious morning warmth that came from the streets below, as I stood at the open window and remembered how Pierre and I had bickered like two enraged children after James had left us. We had quarrelled most stupidly, yet there I was sniffing the intoxicating bustle of the Paris street, feeling outrageously glad, with no guilt whatsoever concerning my part in the previous night’s distemper, completely lacking that taste of sour sickness which invariably matches the morning after the row.

How often in the past, I had woken on such a fine bright day to feel my automatic surge of optimism

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crumble into a fevered shivering anxiety, merely because words spoken until sleep overtook even the tallest fury had all been deliberately wrecking in intention. Then the bright day became an added burden, simply because it could not straightaway be praised and enjoyed. Moreover, often the bright day itself became an extra spur towards resuscitating the hopeless tangle of the previous night's harmfulness, as if the inability to appreciate the morning's sparkle must needs to be given some additional piece of justification. Resentment takes over as a feeling of being cheated out of the pleasure of the bright hour assumes control, and the quarrel of the previous night is revived, almost self-initiated, to a pitch of spleen not encompassed during its first stage. Thus, precipitously, anger, unreason and despair unite to destroy, through battered insults, all that the heart and spirit wish to keep sacred, sweet and untainted, particularly when outside the window the air is quick to stress the sun's invigorating quality and one must remain indoors, self-immolated between four walls, to re-fashion the spiteful words so maliciously twisted between lover and lover.

Then on that June morning in Paris I remembered with amusement every detail of the previous evening, starting from when Pierre came up to James and myself sitting in Weber's, and I decided

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we should all three go and eat at a little bar-restaurant I knew.

Such a gay trio we were as we set out, hailing a taxi to drive us down the rue Royale, across the place de la Concorde, glistening in the rain like a setting from a ballet based on a medley of Offenbach tunes, and over to the left bank and to the narrow street where my bar-restaurant was.

The rain sprayed through the cab's open windows, and as the taxi raced hectically through and round and about other taxis, cars, bicycles and pedestrians, my intoxication, gained through sitting so long at Weber's with James, dissolved into a high-spirited and unalcoholic liveliness. Pierre on my left, James on my right, and Paris all about me; the absurdity of the combination of these elements relaxed and stimulated me. This is what I am alive for I said to myself, able then as I was to give myself such preposterous illusions of joy.

If, as I am, you are susceptible to the caressingly seductive influence of French cabaret songs, you will better understand the tonal quality of the evening when I took Pierre and James to my bar-restaurant off St. Germain des Prés.

A long narrow room mostly patronised by French song-writers and cabaret singers, unknown as yet to the Edith Piaf hierarchy of the successful; all

traditionally talented and versed in the ancient art of the ballad singer, all able to extricate melancholy and restlessness from the simplest operation of living. Instinctively selecting the habitual as the structure for their limpid and elusive songs, they transform the contemporary colloquialisms into a lyricism of tenderness and irony in which, ever present, is the rotation of life and death. A walk along the Seine, a smiling child, lovers at ease, a day's work well done—within the grace of these and similar simplicities lie the fugitive thoughts of good and ill which provide those mellifluous songs which only the French can write and sing and make into poetry.

My bar-restaurant smelt of this kind of song. You might pass it in the street if you did not know about it, as you would pass a hundred small bar-restaurants whose windows were dim and uninviting to the tourist. If you are by nature more adventurous than most tourists with their planned time, you might peer in through the glass door, attracted by the sound of a piano, by the sound of a guitar, by a singing voice. Here song-writers and future cabaret stars try out their latest melodies; here the ballad composer Piaf has not yet heard about, barter a few hours of his time for one of Madame's the proprietress's excellent dinners with the simple

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currency of entertaining himself and Madame's diners at the piano. Here a young guitarist offers the unpublished lyric praising the streets of Paris or the île St. Louis, while Madame, small efficient Madame from Burgundy, scurries about her patrons while keeping a loving yet wary eye on her 'free' artistes. At the small bar you drink with the watchful Pauline who serves her customers with an indolence which reveals some knowledge of what it is all about. Then you may eat Madame's luscious and extravagantly prepared food, all the while abandoning yourself to gusts of gaiety and nostalgia, which periodically unsettle the talk as your ear catches some of the background syncopation.

As I write I am listening to a gramophone record of the 'Ballad de l'île St. Louis', remembering how I first heard this song, long before it reached the public, in the bar-restaurant to which I took James and Pierre. And, as I listen, I recall that evening which, on the face of it, was merely a time of three people drinking and eating in a small bar-restaurant which offered an extraneous almost incidental entertainment. Yet the structure and futurity of that evening were proportioned according to the composition of those French songs—behind the simplicity brooded an active implication. In retrospect only can we see milestones.

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How was I to know that on an evening in June while the rain pelted its summer fury against the glass door of the little bar-restaurant off St. Germain des Prés, some quirk in James's nature urged him to foresee the possibility of malicious intent towards Pierre and myself? Perhaps, at the time, even James did not fully realise how subtly he could use the situation in order to satisfy—to satisfy what? Even now I cannot precisely determine what James's eventual aim satisfied in himself, nor indeed, knowing all I do about James, can I quite understand how a nature such as his could so felinely influence the situation Pierre and I had created for our privacy and our secrecy.

James liked Pierre, respected and trusted him as a man so very different to himself, a man consequently never appearing in any way to compete with him. In any case James was not the kind of man who acknowledged competition; only too realistically he knew that his accomplishments were the accomplishments of men similarly endowed with his particular causticity. Nor was it jealousy since, putting aside any temporary feeling James might have had for me, jealousy again was a meaningless term to James if only because jealousy had never fused into his experience. Nor again could it have been dislike of me, because in part James recognized some

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common fellowship. In other circumstances and lacking certain emotional tones, I might well have been a female James. I was therefore able to like James, regardless of whether his actions and moods clashed with my ultimate assessments and valuations. I respected his truth, or rather I respected his direct and spontaneous behaviour, which resulted quite naturally from his view of the world as he found it in relation to the world's view of him. I liked him because his honesty produced in me as full a measure of honesty as is in my character to reveal.

Possibly James's participation in this story of Pierre and myself may have been as accidental as my encounter with Pierre, as accidental and, consequently, as necessary to the theme. Looking back I can indeed see that it was James who influenced the development and denouement of my love for Pierre, although I can also see that it was the factor of James which was as paramount as James the man.

Previously there had been only Pierre and myself. Pierre and myself with desire for each other which we satisfied since we behaved as though we lived independently outranged from other influences. Then there was James. James with what would be conventionally described as his crooked slant on the world and his corruptive unromantic personality. James who took and gave and cared neither one way

nor the other. James with his kindness and his callousness which were both operatively controlling the efficacy of his personal survival. It was indeed a constant focus of survival for James, this life, this living from minute to minute, for James who acknowledged only the 'dirt' as an alternative, and who did not clutter his mind, and thus temporarily corrode his speed, with the alternatives in life, as we mostly do who are weaned on a certain mixture of æsthetics and philosophies. Not for James ever the digestive troubles of the intellect. He lived without the luxury of those trimmings which we spread over our daily bread, hardly knowing which to savour since all are served with such spicy sauces.

"I get along without them," James would say, casting off religion, politics and the stimulation and sensuality of art and literature as so much superfluous chassis work. 'Getting along' was James's only concern, and surely in all of us, at times, envy of men like James rises like the white foam of a wave, particularly when we stand at the shore's edge and taste the salt.

"That's why I'm a damn good reporter," James would explain. He refused to describe himself as a journalist, believing that journalism was a parasitical growth of literature, and that an exponent must inevitably be 'a man with his feet too wide apart for

good pleasure'; a man forced to work on the interest of other men's capital. James shied at the term of writer as a horse backs from fire. "I'm just happy to tell what I see and repeat what I hear. That's quite explosive enough without any extemporaneous digression from me. I'm a recording machine. Only difference is I eat, drink, sleep, and . . ." he looked at me sideways, "and get around."

This kind of talk started the whole thing that evening as the guitar player entertained us with a parody of Segovia's virtuosity. Previously there had only been Pierre and myself. As I half-listened to James stating a number of obvious self-truths, and as I watched Pierre listening to James, similarly, I concentrated on the obvious which was that the introduction of James into the twofold being of Pierre and myself, the introduction of the Jamesian factor as it were, produced in me an instinctive action of selection which meant Pierre as against James and men like James. Having so far admitted what had been produced by that afternoon with James, I was now at the point when quite spontaneously I could express my love for Pierre.

That, I thought as I looked at James, is what you have done. Sitting there in that atmosphere of deceptive intimacy, senses temporarily swaddled, I placed the responsibility with James.

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And, I remember figuratively asking James, what now will you be able to do? What effect will these components which distil your particular chemistry have upon this recreated constitution of matter which is Pierre and myself? It would have been almost negligent if I had not then admitted the active power of James.

There he was with us, linked to us, directly and indirectly, as we were bound to him. There was danger and yet excitement, since danger does not emerge as a reality until excitement apprehends that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. I decided then and there to follow the line from my starting point of love for Pierre, feeling, as I made my decision, an exhilaration the like of which I had not allowed myself for some time. Yes, I thought looking at James, I'm taking that straight line.

"Now tell us, sweetie," James grinned at me; "why did you bring us here? Let's hear about that past of yours." He knew I did not consider I needed to answer.

About me it fell that accumulation of past experience, fragmentary, glistening and positive. Years of time and time of knowing which had created me and which must surely be traced upon me as ineffably as the gold and silver paint was spread, centuries ago,

on illuminated manuscripts now exhibited under glass in museums all over the world. Watching me curiously sat Pierre, wondering perhaps about that time I had lived before knowing him, thinking perhaps of his time before knowing me. He smiled at me:

"We'll take now shall we?"

"I'm going to Vienna next week. Come with me?" James knew this was hardly an offer for consideration. "I'll be back anyway some time."

I remembered this remark only retrospectively, only retrospectively when James did come back some eight days later. Then in the small bar-restaurant off St. Germain des Prés, I failed again immediately to appreciate the inevitable factor of James. James who was James as I knew him, James as Pierre knew him, James as we both knew him, and James the accidental but irrevocable intruder in all experience which spins to a rotation of life and death.

How the quarrel began between Pierre and myself after James had left us, I cannot exactly recall except that in some way it grew out of our discussing James. We had walked back across the river, along the rue de Rivoli, turning into the rue Royale towards the Madeleine and my hotel, heatedly talking about James as though we were

each passionately concerned with the personality of James.

Something about the brilliantly-lit streets, at that late hour of night, and the floodlit Madeleine, caused me to assess the potentialities of a quarrel before we became immersed in one.

I stopped as we turned towards the boulevard des Malesherbes, stopped because the possibility of a rare excitement was shaping into a new experience. I became acutely aware of its implications.

"You seem to know a lot about him. He seems to know a lot about you," Pierre was saying.

Then the excitement cracked open like an over-ripe nut. This truly was mine then, this power to decide whether or not a quarrel should ensue. There it was within me that unholy joy for the knowledge which inflamed my mind towards the obvious experiment. I decided then and there to provoke, produce, sustain, and control a quarrel with Pierre, if only because the novelty appealed to my sense of poetic justice.

Produce, provoke, sustain and control—all these quite deliberate tactical operations now lay in my power; lay with me, whom for so long past had voluntarily submitted to their mercilessness.

I could not resist the pleasure, and you who have experienced these bitter, devastating quarrels which

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batten on the nervous system with all the implacable application of those biblical locusts who laid waste the land of Egypt, you will only too surely understand how pleasurable it can be to participate in a quarrel one had deliberately provoked, and throughout which one is able to remain emotionally unharmed.

This quarrel with Pierre was a luxury to me. Had I not reached that point of loving Pierre? Indeed, I had voluntarily stationed myself at that junction; yet then, with the floodlit Madeleine behind us, I was too wildly intoxicated with the novelty of a quarrel self-instigated and self-encouraged, so that love for Pierre had no power to control my eagerness.

I sat down on one of the street benches, almost unbalanced by the scent of my new pleasure. Carefully choosing my words, I spoke of James as though he were a rare being, using just that combination of adjectives which I knew would not fail to cause Pierre to flounder and become careless in argument. I almost hugged myself when he sat down on the opposite side of the seat—it was one of those double benches, seat backed on seat—and pontifically proclaimed that he, Pierre, ‘believed in the mediocre’.

It was a wonderful quarrel with Pierre. I danced a kind of musical-chairs fling about the bench,

grinning openly at the visual extravaganza of Pierre rushing to my side of the bench, which provoked me to a dramatic switch to the side he had deserted, and drew him back again to his original side as I slipped away from it. Then, for a few minutes, Pierre would lean from his side over to mine trying to calm me down. When we sat, back to back, giving me time to calm down, I would turn round and attack again, which put in motion the musical-chairs act. By this time we had quite a few spectators to our ludicrous farce, and on Pierre's temper these had a corrosive effect, while on me the effect of these undisguisedly enchanted spectators was intensely stimulating.

I found myself playing most horribly to the gallery, almost encouraging the drunk who tried to join in and was heartily pushed into the gutter by an almost demented Pierre. I smiled most coquettishly at the man in the worker's overalls who informed the other spectators that they were witnessing a 'small' lover's quarrel. I laughed quite hilariously when a lumpy prostitute, who was promenading her snuffling bulldog, advised Pierre to use, what in her experience of life, was the only weapon man had against woman's irascibility. I became quite unjustifiably insulted when a small shrunken man, following one of Pierre's briefer tirades against

Englishwomen, shook his fist in my face informing me that all the English—Churchill included—were utterly unworthy of French consideration. "We shed our blood on the barricades for you hypocrites"; which remark led Pierre to tower above the small man with abuse about civilians who 'hid behind skirts' while men were rotting in prisoners-of-war camps. That, of course, was something the crowd loved. I sat back on my side of the bench, offered an English cigarette to the prostitute, and watched the crazy antics of a street political argument. I watched while Pierre created enemies and created allies.

"Men always fight," remarked the prostitute, and then she shrieked for the help of all men and God and 'le bon curé', because her beloved waddling bulldog had ambled off into the middle of the road. Perhaps it was just as well that the sound of brakes screeching was louder than the voices of Pierre and his supporters, because it looked, as far as I could judge, as though Pierre's side was losing if only through lack of military reserves.

The focus of crowd interest shifted from Pierre to the prostitute, who was sitting in the middle of the road, her arms clasped about the uninterested bulldog, murmuring love-words to him, while jerking her head up between doggy kisses to accuse the

lorry driver, who had managed not to run over the bulldog, of being a Communist. Dispassionately I looked about for the policeman, for the policeman who would surely rush upon all of us and scoop us into a van; but no policeman and no van appeared. We were just a big happy little crowd insulting one another as fluently as lay in our expostulate power.

Then, characteristically, the tumultuous street scene dissolved, as though by magic, into several groups of friendly twos and threes, each party most happily self-devoted. I noticed that the prostitute and her bulldog were escorted by the small shrunken cantankerous man who was holding the dog's lead. There was indeed no need for police and police vans—some telepathic instinct must have reached the local gendarmerie informing them about the obvious conclusion. No heads broken, no one stabbed, no dog crushed under lorry tyres—only Pierre and myself left exactly where we began.

As we walked on, laughing until we could hardly breathe, I remember telling myself that I had been a fool not to have known that in Paris a row would turn out exactly as it had.

And, when, the following morning, I stood at the open window, I was still linked to that laughter which had released me from past memories of past quarrels in which Pierre had no place. Yes, at the

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time, I did indeed believe in that release, and as the telephone rang I knew, before I rushed to pick up the receiver, that it was Pierre calling.

Joyously, heedlessly, I answered Pierre with whom I was then in love.

"Yes. Yes," I said. "And the day is wonderful. The day is wonderful."

Thus it became, between Pierre and myself, an affair of love. If, for say a week in June, you have been sitting indoors watching the rain swamp down relentlessly, as you might in England, you will have experienced, when the sun eventually breaks through with the obvious intention of permanence, that abrupt change of tempo in your blood which, until that moment, coursed lethargically through your veins and caused you to move with a sleep-walker's torpor. Then you can open your windows and your doors, and go out into the garden with a quickening step, because at last the climate has become seasonal in aspect.

For me, at last, the climate was seasonal. I was used to love, invigorated by it, and now, after so long a time of limping disconsolately between the

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depressive tracks of self-immunisation, I could freely offer myself to the wondrous gaiety of love which has no past or futurity.

'This time of now,' I kept on saying to myself as I slid along the Paris streets to meet Pierre who was taking me to the Bois de Boulogne; I hardly walked that morning after Pierre's telephone call. 'This time of now,' I repeated to myself, unable to control the laughter in my face which I gave out unselectively to everyone I passed along the boulevards, seeing my happiness in them, wishing it upon them, willing them to respond to the smile I spent as I walked along.

I record this time of wondrous gaiety not only to add incident to this story of Pierre and myself, but because I know this to be a record of common experience, no matter how young or old the participants. A time of wondrous gaiety may often result in love; result in love more enduring than a fugitive gaiety; result in love which tenderly assumes the structural proportions of necessary habit, which, being so familiarly intimate, constitute our home and which we describe so simply as our life. The fact that often this wondrous gaiety appears as an annual as distinct from the perennial plant in no way diminishes the splendour of its flowering. It is, indeed, this kind of love, an intoxication for the

blossom. At such times the days assume kaleidoscopic dimensions, and one's memories of them consist of a chain of intertwined silver rings. For me there was gaiety, Paris, and Pierre.

Pierre, yes, there was Pierre, who until then had existed more as a loved enemy than as a man to whom I gave love. I have introduced him to you as I met him, through my vision which was at first cautious, deliberate and unemotional. I have more or less described the look of him; his height, his dark hair, his grey eyes—and from what I have told you, you must have gathered that he was good in bed. You have understood that his personality was pleasing in a definite way, which all would understand, and you know, as I do, what he did for his living, that he was married, had a child, and lived in Paris. In addition to all these indications, you have probably decided that Pierre is a man who does not talk about himself a great deal, but then I have allowed James to explain himself more fully.

Pierre, yes Pierre, let me look again at Pierre focused in the centre of that period of wondrous gaiety, from the time when, almost shyly, we greeted each other at the rendezvous point-of-departure for the Bois de Boulogne.

"We're beginning again," he said, as he helped me into the bus that was taking us to the Bois. "I've

taken a week's holiday. Some leave due. You are going to have a tourist's week in Paris. Wonderful weather guaranteed and the best possible escort."

Only the physically hardy or those in love should travel in Parisian buses, whose mechanism is surely not constructed on orthodox engineering principles which when related to public transport guarantee a certain comfort as well as some discomfort. At first we stood grasping whatever support was possible, subjected to the continual pummelling of those anxious to get off and those anxious to get on, until at last, not without a modicum of danger, we managed to slip on to the rough wood of a seat. All the time I was conscious that Pierre and I were together, that in the jolting of the bus I could put my hand on his arm knowing that this was more than a mere steadying gesture—it was a declaration of love to touch him then.

A declaration of love! Yes, that was what it was then, and which we did not need to put into words. Previously we had talked about love; previously we had talked about love before we had taken it into our shared experience; spoken of love as fluently as though discussing someone estranged from us whom we had previously known intimately—which indeed was exactly the case. Had not Pierre known love intimately before he met me?

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There he was facing me and laughing, as he rowed us around the Bois's lake, his face glowing with a luminously active youthfulness. There he sat, swaying slightly to the rhythm of the oars, with his thirty-two years of life, thirty-two years of experience in which I had no reality, thirty-two years which bound him to certain landmarks, certain places, certain people, all of which he had loved most intimately.

He had told me about some of those thirty-two years, or rather, he had answered as briefly as he possibly could the questions I had put to him about the why and the wherefore of all those years which had brought him to the point of our meeting. In questioning, I had no motive other than to inform myself that at such a point I had joined the chain of Pierre's circumstances, which in themselves had previously created the probability of my ultimate arrival.

"My rowing is making you introspective," Pierre said. "Shall we get out and walk?"

As we left the boat-house Pierre made his point.

"We're going to take this. You understand. We are going to take it now."

"Haven't we already taken—in some measure?" I made my last protest.

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"Only time and sex," he replied. "Now there's you and me and such a wonderful day."

This is not a lament for a lost love, merely a selection of impressions to show that what was in the beginning curiously deliberate, was as subject to the unpredictable, as is all experience. I went to Paris to forget about love, to omit it from future calculations, and I found Pierre who offered the novelty of love-making without love. If I had met James first, the issue would have been simple, but I did not meet James first. I met Pierre. On the other hand if I had not met James after meeting Pierre, the issue would still have been comparatively simple. For some time, perhaps for ever, I could have continued to believe that Pierre meant no more than any equally presentable and competent lover. Only the incidental experience of James showed me how I had unknowingly caught up with love again.

If there can be said to be any morality in this fragment of experience, it is to be found in the fact that love did eventually become part of this tale, and love, being a pure and essential part of life, must in itself contain a certain morality—if you are the kind of person who requires a morality.

These haphazard memories of Pierre are therefore not indeed a lament for lost love, but rather evidence of how foolish I had been ever to have

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supposed that I could remain immune from love which catches us all so inopportunately.

Moreover, there is nothing lost about my love for Pierre which needs to be lamented. I have not taken it with me. I have left it there in Paris where I found it.

There it is, that unlamented love for Pierre, germinating even now where it was scattered, on the grey stone of the île St. Louis, in the dust of all the streets that lead to the Madeleine, in the songs they are singing at this moment in the small bars, among the trees that line the boulevards, and somewhere, almost everywhere, along the Seine, is my unlamented love for Pierre.

Indeed along the Seine it is this love, or should I now write about it as that love? By the Seine, where we strolled, bemused by the relaxing ease of a Parisian Sunday, watching the serious men who fish at the river's edge glowing with the secret inner passion of the pridefully occupied. That was our day for Nôtre Dame and the île de la Cité, and the narrow side streets with their Villonish names, and the raffish houses with a scent about them of Jacques Thibault, of Maistres Robert, Guillaume et Jacques, of Procureur Fournier, and of Rose herself of the Testament. It was our day ambling towards the île St. Louis with that lilting ambience

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Parisians call *le badaud*. Our day of passing the coal tankers moored to the quayside; the day of brass-polishing, the day of washing, the day of cooking and rest.

"And people live all the year round in these boats," I exclaimed, as we passed tug after tug, and I wondered what kind of place Pierre and I would live in if we lived together, because that was a day when even the inconceivable could in some measure be conceived.

As I begin to remember those days, the places rush at me and fuse into one visual scene, in which the memory of Versailles is confused with an afternoon in the Botanical Gardens. Somewhere, there is an absurdly gay drive in a horse-carriage taken after a hilarious prancing about on the second stage of the Eiffel Tower. Similarly lighted in my mind are memories of a morning visit to Montmartre and the Sacré Cœur, and an early Saturday evening stroll about the Théâtre Marigny, watching the childrens' roundabout near the Rond Point, while only a few paces away, also part of our love, was the concentrated avidity of the stamp collectors who sit and stand in groups, ferocious and watchful and speculating.

Some memories assume a cardboard immobility of a fun-fair when the mechanism has stopped. Some

evenings when the sun crawls from the sky as though silently weeping, those who walk in the streets are disconcerted and taken unawares, as we were when we dined at the small students' eating-place in the rue de Tournon, because Pierre had known it in his Sorbonne days. The atmosphere was sharp and simple, created by the young who ate hungrily, with books propped up in front of them, among friends equally equipped with books and manuscripts and poetry reviews. We sat among them, endeavouring to dispel our instinctive embarrassment at being out of our environment, while at the table next to ours sat an elderly woman out of one of Katherine Mansfield's stories.

"Miss Brill," I said to Pierre, hoping he had read that pitiless tale of the dead end of misery. He had not, and why indeed should I have expected him to leap automatically to my references?

"One looks forward, you see," I said. "And one looks backward."

Still Pierre did not instinctively grasp my reference to the elderly woman at the next table and the young people behind us.

"And you and I," I continued, disregarding the senselessness of pursuing my thesis with Pierre. "We are the static milieu. We have reached the period of focus. We neither look forward nor look backward.

We can see it all from our raised plateau of the middle years."

Then I broke off this nonsensical soliloquy, because I realised my talk sprang from an earlier memory of Paris and dinner in such a place. I believe that in order to evade the possible cafard, we spent the rest of the evening drifting from the Deux Magots to Lipp's, to the Royale and back again to the Deux Magots, letting ourselves become involved in a lot of talk with a number of people who enjoy a lot of talk. In the end we did evade the cafard by the simple remedy of getting very drunk. At the time, through all the talk and alcohol, I remembered that I knew where the wrong was—in the past which Pierre had not shared with me.

Once when love, as love so often does, reached a peak of desperation because we were riding high on the wave of urgency, savouring only the subtle flavour of joy and acknowledgment, I put my hand on Pierre's arm and asked him what in heaven's name we had once both wanted.

We were sitting in a small bar. Behind us a wireless vibrated with jazz tunes from the 'twenties and early 'thirties—all most innocuously interwoven with our youth.

"Surely, surely," I said, "there must have been a time when we both wanted something important

from life. A time when we both planned to contribute some accomplishment to those which we so admired. Well, why don't you answer? Say something? Or have you nothing to say? Nothing?"

He looked at me in that veiled smiling way of his.

"Nothing," he said, looking at me and still smiling.

Indeed, I thought, there is really nothing either of us could say, because neither of us was young enough to indulge in a mutual intoxication of glorified chatter about the higher motives and purposes of life, and neither was old enough yet to allow ourselves to express the inevitably lazy phrases in praise of philosophical renunciation. We were both too much faced with our mutual reality, knowing all there was to know about our past youth, and utterly prepared for the years before us.

We belonged to the cautious and steady thirties, and we accepted the weakness and strength in ourselves as structural qualities, not as arbitrators to our possible actions. There we were, quite unromantically knowledgeable about our present situation. Two people caught in a mutual sensuality of desire and love, accepting it as reasonably as we accepted the time of day or night, even though often we might wonder how quickly time went, how slowly time lagged, or how often we failed to notice time at all. Life was neither before us nor behind us.

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Only too evidently was life with us, as we faced each other with our mutual preoccupation, our separate backgrounds, which, even then, fashioned and influenced our reactions—even our reactions to the restricted activity of our love.

There was no question of either renouncing or breaking with the people and circumstances of our habitual existence, nor indeed any question of our giving them less of our attention, thought and care. We belonged to the middle thirties, that time of life when men and women know, most stringently, how inevitable is the recognition of the truth of all human relationships, and how impractical it is not to accept the definite divisions of truth.

We were standing in the gardens of the Palais Royale when a child bowled her hoop straight at me. I caught the slim blue wooden circle, and waited for the owner to approach with that mixture of shyness and arrogance a child adopts when, through some unforeseen accident, her play is interrupted by an adult.

"That's what Annette always does. Just slashes at the hoop," Pierre exclaimed.

"Annette?" I asked, although I knew that he meant his own child.

We handed over the hoop to the child, who half-snatched her property away from our grasp,

leaving us with an odd sense of shared guilt.

"You mind, don't you?" Pierre was saying.

"Mind?" I was purposefully blank.

"You must be more practical." His voice was almost harsh.

I turned my face away from his scrutiny; impatiently, as though to reassure both of us that I was most coldly aware of the inescapable past which had made him and made me. I turned my face away, and as I did, I automatically looked towards one of those long graceful open windows of the apartments overlooking the Palais Royale gardens.

Yes, I told myself, Madame Colette would be there now most probably—at this time of mid-afternoon. She would be there, lying on her colourful theatrical couch, looking down on to the Palais Royale gardens, listening to what she called 'mes enfants, mes oiseaux', viewing what she called 'mon jardin'.

There I stood in the loveliest public garden of Paris, at the edge of one of the miniature lakes, while about me raced the children, shouting to each other, causing fat pigeons to flutter away from their zestful exuberance, while nurses, mothers and grandmothers relaxed on benches, on small rusty iron chairs, passive yet alert to the voice of their particular charges.

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I stood watching the sauntering movement of the casual walker through these gardens, watching old men shuffling along with peering crafty downcast eyes, watching the beetling antics of the old woman who sold chair-tickets and spent most of her time waving her fists at the children whose pretence at chair-sitting drove her to shake frenziedly and call on her 'bon Dieu' to protect her from such devils.

I stood watching, watching it all, watching Pierre with whom I was able to walk, knowing that up there, behind one of those graceful open windows, lived Colette whom illness had immobilised on a couch. Yes, most probably she was there, watching the scene as she always watched the scene, with those deep-set observant eyes in which shrewdness tempered tenderness.

In the sun, below her window, I could hear her voice again: "Alors, vous voulez savoir mes secrets?" I could hear my reply: "Mais madame j'ai vos livres." Could hear her chuckle—melodious yet hoarse like the mistlethrush's. "Mais que vous êtes jeunes," she had said, with her half-a-century's experience more than mine. I remembered that someone with me at the time, someone with half-a-century's less experience than Colette, had brought the talk of life to the talk of writing, and how Colette had put a small plump hand on my wrist and laughed gaily: "Ecrire!

Ecrire, c'est un plaisir et c'est un châtiment!" I remembered all this, as I stood there with Pierre, in the gardens of the Palais Royale, with the memory of Colette's laughter.

"Let's go. Let's go," I urged Pierre who, thinking perhaps that his reference to his own child had distressed me, murmured consoling words. He did not know I wished to run away from the memory of Colette's laughter, from Colette, whose fifty years more of life had given her authority to speak of pleasure and expiation as one self-contained unit of reality.

Yes, in those days I have left my love; given it over entirely to the care of those days that came afterwards, knowing that Pierre and I are still there, although our separate memories and impressions will diminish and shed their sparkle. Sometimes, admittedly, I am swamped by a positive need for Pierre. I want him suddenly to be near me, and then as frantic as the desire is, abruptly it ceases. Very little to keep from what at the time appeared to be so much—which is a great comfort, since we are ill-equipped for perpetuity.

What kind of a man was he really like—this Pierre, you may ask, and I will tell you that I, less than anyone, am able to draw him precisely, and that you must take whatever impression you can take

from my impressions, remembering, of course, that in it all there was love which I do not lament. Then, possibly, if you will accept my focus which is not your focus, then you might be able to glimpse Pierre as I knew him, although you would hardly be wiser—even without love—because this story does not aim for conclusions, and, if you wish to continue, you must accept my focus.

Of course there is an end—an end of a kind since we all have ends of a kind, and I will tell you how it was to some extent towards that end.

There is much I will never tell you, and much that even a closer inspection of Pierre would not reveal, and that is what I keep, since one is always able to keep what is like water running through one's fingers.

There is much that I have not told. All the story behind the story of Pierre and myself; all the small explanations and the obvious. I narrate this story and participate in it, and yet, is it not possible that I have nothing whatsoever to do with it? To others I offer the occasion to deduce and construe. I am leaving this story with you to whom I tell it, as surely as I have left that unlamented love for Pierre in Paris, because in Paris love is quite casually accepted as is the fine high blue of an early summer sky.

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And there is moreover, undoubtedly there is, much that I will keep entirely to myself, since no words can adequately reveal or, as might be the case, conceal, what the two of us in love revealed and concealed. How describe my feelings when Pierre looked me straight in the eyes, taking me completely out of contemporary time? How describe the bouncing pleasure I found walking by his side down a street, and how when we paused to cross, his hand, touching my arm, would almost saturate that pleasure? How describe the indescribable excitement when he came forward to meet and greet me? Did he accomplish all these common activities in some unique fashion? No, he merely walked like a number of men, distinguishable only to me because he was Pierre.

Indeed there is much that I will keep entirely to myself. Much that was behind the pressure of my hands on the hard bones of his back following the peak of love. Much to keep, as we all of us have much to keep to ourselves, which we reveal and conceal in our affairs of love.

"You add to my life," he once said to me, "the extra quality."

"I've a surplus," I answered. "I almost give it away."

That indeed is something which I cannot keep

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even remotely for myself—this extra surplus of life which I carry in my hands and which is among my few assets. This extra layer of vitality is no virtue in me. I was born with a ravenous greed for life which is continuously productive, and in an affair of love, automatically I give away that extra surplus of life which would overpower me if I were compelled to hold on to it.

Thus in my unlamented love for Pierre is that surplus of life. There in those past days and hours it can shine and glitter, as Paris shines and glitters when one goes to meet it and when one bids it farewell. One knows it will remain as one's vision found it—a special, joyful, indescribable enchantment.

Paris is a city one should arrive in at night. So is Venice of course, although with Venice the reason is more obvious when you consider the enchanted route from the station terminus to St. Mark's Square, whether by gondola, smart motor-launch or by one of the lumbering *vaporetti*, along the main canal, eyes dazed by the glittering lights of the palaces and hotels on either side. This, you say to

yourself, is a city straight out of a tale from the Arabian Nights. Indeed the reasons for arriving in Venice at night are almost brashly obvious. Less obvious, but none the less potent, are the reasons for arriving in Paris at night, particularly if you arrive from London where from eleven o'clock onwards people are hurrying home, restaurants are closing down and only night-clubs remain open. From eleven o'clock onwards Paris wakes up—not that it ever really rests or relaxes in tempo.

"Let's go to Weber's," I urged Pierre, because all of a sudden I was flooded with the intoxication of walking at night in Paris.

It is at night that one really savours the essential scent of Paris, at night when the air is warm, as it was on that night, and about us strolled the crowds with that especial happiness reserved for walking in Paris at night. Cars rushed up and down the rue Royale, and at Weber's customers began to order supper. To sit at Weber's watching the people, watching them watching, watching them sitting near, listening unashamedly to your talk as one listens to theirs, is exhilarating. Equally rewarding are the cafés off St. Germain des Prés, although the variety of people is less variable, if only because at St. Germain variety is stressed.

I have a particular fondness for Weber's at night,

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first because I love the floodlit Madeleine, and secondly because at Weber's, in the centre of Paris, the passing crowds are more heterogeneous. St. Germain des Prés might, superficially, be more amusing, more exotic in appeal, but at Weber's the passing and sitting humanity is less intent upon self-dramatisation and consequent limitation. At Weber's people sit and move who have come to terms with their own personalities. St. Germain des Prés is cluttered with those striving to develop their especially identifiable personalities.

"What about some food?" Pierre's offer exactly fitted my delight with Paris at night, where food can be ordered no matter how near to midnight is the hour.

There we were, sitting at Weber's, where we had begun, at ten minutes or so to midnight, ordering a meal too copious to be called supper, drinking a beautiful amber Alsatian wine, surrounded by other enthusiastic late night-diners.

"Do you know this is the eighth day?" I said to Pierre.

"What do we do tomorrow?"

"When do you have to go back to work?" I asked.

"Why should I think about going back tonight? Back? What's that to do with me? Want me to go back?"

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"Dying for you to. Want my freedom."

"Dangerous. You don't know how to handle it—without me."

And so did the talk go, the childish talk lovers use when talk is only a matter of indirect communication.

"Pierre," I said, "are you superstitious?"

"Rather. Occupational neurosis with all scientists." His tone altered. "Why do you ask?"

"No reason at all. Thought passed through my mind. That's all. Ghost walking over my grave and all that." I looked over my shoulder as though playing some kind of game. I looked over my shoulder, and saw that my recognition of the man walking towards us had been real and not imagined.

"I've just got back," he said, as he sat down in the vacant chair at our table. Then turning to me he asked: "Still in Paris?"

"What I love about you, James," I said, "is that you never change. One can rely utterly upon your being so inescapably your obvious self."

"Ducky, I'll buy the love." He grinned widely, as he shouted to the waiter, ordering another bottle of wine.

There are times when I think I could leave this tale, 'walk-out' on it as James would say. There are times indeed when I wonder why I am telling it, and

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whether in telling it, I have caught the bitter acrid enchantment of all that did indeed contribute to this affair of love. Close am I to the participants, suffocated almost by them, am I who invited all the circumstances. "Make it simple, ducky," James would say, James who complicated and confused the issue. "Take it now," Pierre would urge, smiling as he always did when the matter verged on the obsessive. The hour escapes us all.

Indeed there is no reason why I should not leave the whole matter at that midnight hour when James ordered another bottle of wine. Surely, you will appreciate the fascination of such a temptation? What indeed would such a gesture require? Courage or laziness? Yes, easily, I could leave the whole matter there with James's voice, heard as a voice is heard as one leaves a party.

Exit with the unsatisfactory and unsympathetic James, assuming one is among those many who will indeed consider James unsatisfactory and unsympathetic, which, possibly to my discredit, is not my view at all.

In remembering James I have come to love him, which perhaps I should not do, since about James there is little which is really lovable in the recommendable sense. I love him simply because I remember him, which may not justify logic, but

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which does, in some measure, even when related to James, justify life. Yes I could leave my tale with James remembered at Weber's; leave the tale with James when the tale describes Pierre whom I took as one of the inescapable joys of life. Pierre whom I used in order that I might utterly forsake my predilection for the inescapable pain of life.

Should I feel cheated if I left this tale as it is now? Left it as one seldom has the strength to leave any experience—suddenly and quite simply, without comment. It is not possible you would say, meaning that I am too deeply preoccupied with my story of Paris, my story of Pierre, my story of James, and you would be wrong, because the simple is never simple, and the complex is always logical, and I could not leave my story now, because I did not in fact walk out of Weber's that night leaving James with Pierre, leaving them both where they belonged in Paris.

Yes, there we were at Weber's with a full bottle of wine on the table and the midnight hour behind us, and the curiously tender camaraderie we shared. Previously our communal experience, the experience of Pierre, James and myself, had been brittle, on the edge of a possible relationship. Now the quality was protective, almost blissful, if only because we were all keenly conscious of some

disquiet, some unease which had taken shape behind James's 'Still in Paris?'

The hour had escaped us and we were facing a new day.

"Did you think I would go?" I asked James, when Pierre left us for a few minutes.

"You'll go some time, won't you?" was his reply.

Some time, indeed some time I would go. I had missed one time of going that evening. I had missed my own sudden disappearance from the scene. I know I had missed it because I had thought about the possibility.

"Vienna—there's no city like it," James was saying as Pierre returned. "Take you there any time you like?"

If you had come first, I thought looking at James, it would have been quite rational to accept the Vienna trip. With James life would appear quite comprehensible, reduced to his brevities of throw and catch. For centuries men have concentrated on the flexibility and variety of words, sweating with genius and frustration, so that men like James could handle life with the monosyllables.

I watched them talking, talking as men like to talk of matters which only men are supposed to be able to talk precisely about—men's work, men's immeasurably grave concern for the continuity of

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society. I remember thinking that I was tired, that I would like to be in bed with one of those tautly-drawn intellectual American 'thrillers', in bed with a thinly-cut chicken sandwich and some powerfully-scented hot coffee.

I remember thinking all this, if only because I knew that if I had taken a hand in the serious talk, I should have found myself treated by both Pierre and James as the irresponsible transgressor, despite the fact that when alone with either I would be received as an equal in argument. I accepted their inescapable maleness which, biologically, excluded me, a woman, from participation in those sternly prosaic exchanges between man and man concerning the facts and realities of the world we share. And smug was their satisfaction when I began to yawn.

I am forever finding that the sequence of life is preposterously encouraging, by which I refer to the existence of such freakish cycles as, let us say, the gambler's luck. Should you among your morning post find a letter containing a long-awaited cheque, then almost certainly another letter will convey that a second is on its way, and quite likely during the

morning some telephone call will instrumentally provoke the likelihood of yet a third cheque—so will the day progress, moving speedily on the high waves of optimism.

Equally determined is the reversal of the coin. All bills are simultaneously received. In either case, impartially, I welcome this simplicity, this essential rapacity of life, this mathematical certainty. I find it all so substantial, and consequently so enthralling a display of abstract concentration. Odds or evens, no matter what the numbers are, I welcome the consolation which their inevitability reveals; the consolation of knowing that some undemonstratable geometry controls the whole machinery of motion and continuity. I can only approach and reckon this in slender personal columns of perception, but there is enough knowledge in me to know how much knowledge I lack, and to realise how linked I am, and yet how evolved I am from the jurassic dawns.

Indeed you must know what I mean. Think, when everything goes wrong, how a climax is reached when only an expression of hilarity can summarise the emotional bankruptcy. Think of the minute detail which contains the ultimate breaking point; how absurd and ludicrous it often is, and yet how superbly apposite. Comprehensive is your vision

when you have reached full realisation of the lowest common denominator of your distress.

Therefore it was all in the rational and natural order of evolutionary matter, that it should rain as it did the day following James's return from Vienna. No rain flicking from sky to street had there been, during those last days with Pierre—only summer heat and the wicked deception of a climatic *status quo*.

Hastily I closed the windows against the wind and the rain, and irritably complained, over the telephone, that my breakfast had not yet been brought up.

James was back from Vienna. Pierre was at work again. I was still in Paris. We were all still closely associated, and yet we were severed from each other. We might almost have gone back to that beginning with three café tables and six café chairs, substituting the anonymous American for James. We might, all three of us, have sat near to each other in any Paris café, inside and not outside since it was then raining, sat close to each other and not spoken at all. We might indeed have been able to do this, but for the fact that we did so indisputably all three know the other two.

I met Pierre in a small bar. Met him in the wrong kind of small bar; not in one of those

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hundreds of jovial street bars where so many Frenchmen drink their evening aperitif, read their newspapers, and pay ordinary prices for what they consume. We met in one of those lush and intimate bars where the seats are plush-padded, and vulgar exotic baskets of flowers are fixed to the walls, and where the barman is a suavely spoken and discreetly mannered elderly homosexual who appears to have started his career in some English provincial town.

We drank our usual martinis and ate hard-boiled eggs in a subdued and slack fashion, somnolently watched by the white-coated barman, who urged us to his particular brew of champagne cocktail which resulted in a morose gloom. The apathetic barman, persevering out of mere professional habit, brought out his special bottle of Jacobet, which he told me should always be 'sipped' after a good dinner. We had not had any dinner.

Indeed you may well anticipate what I am coming to, you who have doubtless tasted the stale sourness of the untranslatable cafard.

In retrospect a cafard appears almost glowingly attractive; some background nostalgia to a wet afternoon, some oblique stimulation to an evening's drinking. Indeed viewed in retrospect, a cafard, like an old friend or an old enemy, possesses all the

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charm of an illicit affair intime. Brought up, as most of us are, on the principle of concentrated and purposeful activity, we are, in direct reaction to habitual conviction, all the more prone to welcome the subversive symptoms of the cafard, which encourages our subterranean apathy and disinclination to deal with what we designate as the realities of life. Without the cafard we could hardly allow ourselves to indulge the swamplier parts of our natures—in fact we would not dare.

Praise be to the cafard which enables us to join the ranks of the unenterprising. That is how, in retrospect, we view the cafard. Easily, easily can we envy a cafard which belongs to someone else, often to the point of shame at our immunity.

That is how it is when we are not soaked, drenched in the cafard, as Pierre and I were, that evening in the luxury bar in one of the smaller streets leading off the rue de Rivoli.

"Won't you come back?" Pierre was asking.

"Oh yes, possibly. Some time." How, I wondered, had we got to this after one thin martini, one innocuous champagne cocktail and one rather ineffectual gulp of Jacobet?

"You'll let me know when?"

"No." This firmly, because the negative was so in keeping with the bar's decorative properties.

"Why not?" It was also fitting that Pierre should register a protest.

"We can't begin again." A pause was indicated and properly observed. "We won't want to anyway." I was positively riddled with the cafard.

"Have we stopped?"

It was all so delicious this cafard exchange, so fluent in its lopsided fashion. I was ready with my next line.

"In a way. We've reached the crisis."

"Afraid?" He leant forward just a little; not too much, just a little.

"Wary." Ah, that was a satisfactory end to the paragraph.

There is a definite ritual to this cafard business. At this point one should, as we did, Pierre and I, sit silently, despondent, abstractedly concentrating upon whatever sounds reach one from the outer world. In this case it was the swishing whirl of tyres on wet streets, the spasmodic klaxon of traffic, the voice of the newsboy, and the contralto notes of the steady rain beating down outside. While inside, there was comfort in the clinking of an ice-cube, the uncorking of a bottle, the striking of a match, the sound of the barman's cloth as he mopped some part of his counter.

"How appropriate this all is." I broke the syco-

phantic pause. "If we continue we shall spend all our times in bars like this one."

"With each other? Or would you periodically change your escorts?"

"I probably wouldn't notice any difference."

"Not my sort of place," Pierre remarked, rather irrelevantly, I thought.

"No." I decided to commute his admission. "Of course not. You're a family man, aren't you?"

"We're all family men." He was almost smug.

"Not James." I brought it out like a cry in the wilderness.

"What about you?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you. I know practically nothing at all. Some time you must tell me all about you."

"Some time. Some time." I nodded, offering my vision of the promised land.

"Tell me," he began.

I broke into his enquiry with my own question.

"Tell me, Pierre, you've never told me precisely and now the setting is so suitable for the question. Tell me about your wife?"

"What about her?" He was smiling in his vague irritating way.

"Well, everything." I nearly slipped for a moment, nearly lost my innings. In any other place and with-

out the cafard, I might have let the matter drop ; left it where it had mostly been for the two of us, in the territory of unshared experience. The flat smooth emasculated features of the barman encouraged me.

"What went wrong between you?"

"Wrong?" Pierre was almost openly puzzled.

"Yes, dammit. Wrong between you and her. Surely," I glared at him, "it must have gone wrong."

"Why?"

I refused to be routed so outrageously.

"Why indeed! Because, dear man, something must surely have gone wrong."

"What for instance?" He appeared quite genuinely surprised.

"Well, love for instance." There, I had said at least something.

"Oh, love!" He half-mouthed some kind of laughter.

"Yes, love. Love. Love. Love." I was becoming insistent.

"Nothing to do with it." He sounded almost bored.

"Don't be such a fool. Must I be more precise? Some time, some time, dear, dear Pierre, there must have been love between you."

"I suppose so." He used the pause trick again. "In a way there's still love."

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I was nearly angry. "There you are," I stated childishly.

"Nonsense! You jump to conclusions," he said.

"Conclusions?"

"Yes," he explained patiently. "You think there must have been the kind of love you know about." He bent forward. "You're limited, dear love."

"Don't be so blastedly patronizing," I snapped at him. "What about sex?" That, I thought, will jar upon his sense of values.

"Yes, sex." He was bland.

I looked at him, and something about the way his eyes lived by themselves, apart from his other features, led me to the dangerous tracks of this kind of truth. "So you still take it, do you?"

"Yes," he replied. "Why not?"

I lit another cigarette.

"I told you," his voice reached me across several corridors. "You jump to conclusions. You are illogical. I have a wife. We have a child. We periodically share a home." He stopped abruptly. "Want me to change my mode of living?"

"No." I was very alert.

"It's quite remarkably commonplace. A mediocre situation. I admire the mediocre." He was teasing me slightly. "You would hardly believe how possible that is."

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"Do you like it?" Why, I wondered, was I asking?

"Like what?"

"The sex," I said, looking straight at him.

"That just exists too. The facts are simple. You never will believe the obvious. It's a shared thing which is perfectly straightforward."

"Pleasant?" I was losing control.

"Reasonable," he said, and then he boasted. "I'm used to facts."

I believe it was then that I began to laugh.

Later that evening, when the cafard had left us, we recompensed ourselves. We made it up to each other and to our separate selves, as children do who have frightened themselves with tales of ghosts in a darkened room, and who turn to the fragrance of familiar comforts, finding an exorcism in the talk of them.

With Pierre and myself it was love, since love can lend some semblance of solidity to the moment. With us there was the knowledge that the ghosts were with us—the ghosts of the past and the ghosts of the future. James, returning, had brought us back the gift of reality, had claimed us as belonging to his world, and now other creditors were pressing forward their precise and indefinite claims. Eight days we had known with little reference to light or darkness or hour; eight days which we chose to

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forget as definite units of one calendar which we, like a million others, were in the habit of consulting.

Work there was which imposed a certain discipline, and which we needed because in us both there was, as in a million others, the desire to contribute. People there were, the friends, the enemies, the loved and unloved ones, which we needed because their existence guaranteed our own.

Time, work and people were our necessary creditors, as they are yours who read what I am writing, and who thereby become part of this story of Pierre, this story of James, this story which took place in Paris since a story must have a place, although I dare say Istanbul or New Orleans or London could equally provide a setting for my story of Pierre and James. An affair of love is a common experience in all places where men spend their time on work and people.

"Pierre," I said, "what are you thinking about?" As I spoke, I realised this was the first time I had asked him this very common question between lovers.

"About you."

"What an easy thing to say."

"Yes, about you. I was wondering what you are like when you're not with me."

"Why?"

"Because I want to know."

"Don't you know at all?"

"In a way. In a way."

I stretched out my hands, touching his face, holding it so that my vision of it was complete.

"I love the feel of you," I said as I stroked his mouth with two fingers, lightly rubbing the emery-board surface left by his razor above and below his lips. "I want you to be happy."

"I am," he said.

"Happy, tomorrow and tomorrow." My hands touched his ears and moved slowly towards his dark hair.

"Are you trying to say good-bye?"

"I won't say good-bye to you."

"Never?"

"Your hair is absolutely straight. Not a curl anywhere," I said. "Thick and stiff. No," I touched the back of his neck. "There won't be any need ever to say good-bye to you. Every time we part I'm saying good-bye."

"One day you might really say it and I'll try and stop you."

"Why should you?"

"Because I should miss you."

"Miss me? In what way?"

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"I'm getting used to you. I'm a man of habits."

"Mistrust habits," I muttered as he kissed me.

"Darling, darling," he said; "Remember, won't you, I wanted this to continue."

"What will you remember?"

"Everything." His answer sounded so simple and almost convincing.

And because I realised we had come full circle, had returned to our beginning, I drew him to me with all the tenderness that limbs can communicate and said: "So will I, dear one. So will I."

In remembering an affair of love there is the danger of omission. It is so psychologically easy to remember the beginning and the end and to forget what happened in between. The end is as stimulating as the beginning to remember; both possess such naturally commemorative qualities. The end is as emotionally glamorous as the beginning, since the end also has its time of climax which makes it as sensual as the beginning. What resists romantic transcription is that time between which is static and emotionally unrelieved by decision. The sticky middle period of knowing too much and knowing

too little, because one has covered the whole area of an impermanent relationship.

I have almost been tricked by the memory of the beginning and the end of this tale into concealing the mood and quality of that time in between when Pierre and I reached an unacknowledged stalemate. Such a time is hardly pleasurable to recall, because when one remembers any particular period one is forced to verisimilitude, and whereas one can varnish the actuality, one cannot cheat one's own memory.

Pierre and I had reached the point when we knew we had used each other as far as it was possible for either of us. Our self-indulgent exploitation had come full circle. We each possessed hard resilient cores which enabled us to withhold from each other those dwelling-places which we reserve for our separate continuities. This practical knowledge had nothing to do with the love which bound us still. It was more a matter of accepting the inevitable boundaries of our mutual knowledge. Had we trespassed further we would have been forced to decisions and revelations. Had we been younger we might perhaps have rushed towards these false solutions. Had we been older we might have been impulsive and snatched at the mirage of renewal, and moonshined about 'beginning anew'.

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Fortunately we were both essentially possessive and independent, caring most for what we had each made of our separate circumstances, knowing we could not adapt our separate characters to conform with our two very different forms of experience. Thus we were saved from making fools of ourselves by any declaration of life everlasting between us, which explains, perhaps how we managed to keep so much of ourselves from each other.

We both knew all this as we lived in that middle period of that affair of love which prevented either of us from going away. It was an impatient time that period between the beginning and the end. A time one could not leave, simply because one knew exactly what kind of a time it was.

I had the feeling of being trapped. Trapped by an existing situation, knowing that life for me then was narrowing. There was a desire to escape, and yet perversely no attempt at escape was made. This I showed by constantly expressing a wish to be doing something other than what we were doing at the moment.

"How restless you are," Pierre protested in his fashion.

"Does it annoy you?" I rather hoped it did.

"I can't see the purpose."

"Must you always have a purpose?"

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"Of course." He was quite definite.

"What about us? What purpose there do you think?"

"I wasn't thinking about us."

Thus did we hit our heads against the wall.

"Don't you see," I threw my pebbles of irritation into the wasteful sea of his realism. "Life for us is thinning down. Time thinning down. Yours and mine. The years narrow. Here we are wedged together by love. And beyond us experience—vast limitless acres of experience neither you nor I will ever have. All that we shall miss. All time we shall never have. All the people. All the places. All the people. Don't you see?"

"Yes, yes, I know." His voice was soft. "I know, but I don't want it all."

"How dreadful!" I could not envisage a limited need.

"I am not made for it all. It would make me uncomfortable. Vastness is non-existent for me. Depth and width can always be measured. You ask for trouble."

"What about this? Us of now? What of the width? What of the depth?"

"High-falutin' chemicals," he said, laughing at me. Thus did we hit our heads against the wall.

I remember a number of similar exchanges which

all combined to strengthen the obstinacy of our affair of love, and which although so manifestly indications of revolt combined to strengthen our determination to hang on for as long as was possible, and, oddly enough, did in some curious fashion invigorate our mutual preoccupation and heighten our sense of joy at our meetings.

I cannot quite remember what made Pierre ask me what I should have thought was almost too neurotic an enquiry from him, when he said:

"Don't you want more from me?"

"No. Does that worry you?"

"Some women might . . ." his tone was mild. He never wished to appear presumptuous.

"For instance?" I persisted although I knew he had only wanted one simple answer to his question.

"Well," he was obviously slightly worried by having to describe it: "Well, security for instance."

"Security?" I stressed my disbelief in this state.

"I," he began, obviously uneasy as to how to phrase his bounteousness, "if you feel . . ." he hesitated again, obviously ill-used to such reassurances. "The whole matter could be considered in practical terms." Distaste for the business made him sound pompous.

"I don't want anything at all," I was fierce. "What do you want?"

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He blushed slightly. "I'm hardly in a position to dictate."

"You mean that men can dispense with the requests. That women alone are allowed to make demands. Evidence of the weaker sex in them. Yes, I understand. How clearly you put it. It's quite a convention, isn't it, this view of women wanting something. The act of love is not enough. You expect me to ask for the inevitable junk of salvage."

"You'll get your salvage all right. One way or another." He seemed very certain.

"Perhaps I will. Perhaps I will," I said, smiling at him again, because I knew that we all salvage something from every wreck; this can be counted among our minor realities if not always among our minor comforts.

"How long you going on with this?" James asked me as he bought me another drink.

"What's it to do with you?" I snapped.

"Everything has got something to do with me."

"Really?"

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"Everything I see and hear and know is something to do with me."

"Don't be obvious."

"Don't deny the obvious then."

"You don't really exist in this. You're only incidental." I hoped he knew I was being truthful.

"Don't bicker with me," James said. "By the way, does Pierre know about us?"

"I thought that eventually you would ask that." I was contemptuous. "What made you decide this was the time? Are you quite certain this is the right moment? I should hate you to be inappropriate."

"Put it this way," James had a way of stretching his limbs which was intensely irritating and which invariably preceded some slab of his particular idea of logic. "You're nervy. You're restless. You're getting bored. You're on the way out. That's the way it is, isn't it?"

"What's any of that to do with telling Pierre about us, as though it mattered either way?"

"It might provoke a climax. And," James stretched his limbs again; "you love a climax, don't you?"

"Think it would interest Pierre? About us?" I dared him to an affirmation.

"Can't say. Might. Might not. No it isn't Pierre's reaction I'm thinking about. It's yours."

"Mine?"

"Yes. Your reaction to the admission."

"Why should I have a reaction?"

"Any woman would. Second nature." He grinned because he knew this kind of generalization annoyed me.

"Well you tell him," I said childishly. "Go on. I'll back you up. I won't let you down. Confirmation granted whenever required."

"I think you will tell him." James sounded suave. "You won't be able to resist it."

"Will you please stop telling me you know everything about me. It's getting boring."

"Well I'm beginning to know, aren't I?" He grinned; "I suppose you realise that I'm really invaluable to you in all this. Without me you might have to continue with Pierre, and that's quite a disturbing thought, isn't it?"

"You don't come in at all. You just hang around." I could hardly admit the possibility of his truth.

"I remind you you've got another background." It was his favourite point. "I remind you that you belong somewhere."

"You remind me of that?"

"Of course. Don't be slow. Fact that I'm so different from your usual background reminds you that you're just passing through this one. But for me you might accept Pierre as a reality."

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"Don't I?"

"Do you?"

"Of course I do. Of course I do," I said, because had to protest.

"What about Pierre?" I asked before I could stop myself.

"You've got to that stage, have you? Wanting to know about Pierre now? See what I mean? You're steering away. You've started to wonder where it all fits, and that, believe me, is the way to exit. Leave a thing alone without questions and it rotates. Start dismantling the pieces and your packing begins. Now you and me will always fit. Quite easily. Any time. Any place. We take each other as we come. Pierre! That's another matter. You're new to Pierre. I know you. I know him. He's happily puzzled. What kind of a time do you think you're having with Pierre?" He sounded quite fierce.

"Meaning?"

"Meaning you're having a hell of a satisfied time, aren't you?"

"What a hell of a lot you know."

"That's what I've always said," James murmured. "Now what about us doing something quite different? Let's go and find a fair."

"Pierre . . ." I said, more instinctively than I liked.

"O.K." James stood up and beckoned the waiter.

"Pierre first and then the fair. We three must never part. God made us all for each other. What shall we do when you go?"

I nearly wrote that Pierre did not want to come with us to the fair, because it would have been more simple to remember like that, whereas in fact Pierre could not come to the fair.

A fair is some place known in childhood, and rarely rediscovered in later life, although one may often go to the fair. In childhood a fair is some place which has no prelude of getting to and no aftermath of going away from. For the child there is only the fair, and the high-pitched excitement of being involved in the noisy and exciting glitter of the magic which the very word fair suggests. The fair is an all-embracing experience. A first glimpse of the sensuousness of the quick and easy, a wonderland of exotic illusion in which noise and colour and movement combine to create an escape land fraught with welcome anxiety. Behind every painted roof lurks the gypsy who will either charm or kidnap. Every dusty red curtain conceals some explanation of the mystery of life. On every garishly-painted and proud-headed wooden horse can the wildest dreams be fully dreamt, as the fists close tightly round the golden pole, and the body sways to and fro to match the tricky jangling tune of the pipes. From such a

vantage point, the world below one's feet, can life appear infinitely desirable, and time some tangible personal possession.

For the child there is only the fair. No going to and no coming away from, as there was that evening when Pierre told James and myself that he could not come with us to the fair.

"But why not?" I was brutishly persistent, conscious that James was stretching his great bulk over one of Pierre's arm-chairs.

"My wife is coming," said Pierre, making the phrase appear formal, inviting our ridicule.

I stopped myself from frivolously repeating the information to James who was also listening. I stopped myself from adding 'what to the fair?' I stopped myself from all the questions I wished to put, simply because James was there, swinging his legs.

"You'll have to take me by myself," remarked James.

"Are you really going to a fair?" Pierre asked, simply because he was also involved in James being part of us.

"Why not?"

"Which fair?" Pierre could hardly stop himself.

"The first one we meet," James said.

It was exceedingly difficult to get away from that

room which held Pierre and all my unanswered questions.

"A drink for the road," James suggested the obvious and we drank to the gypsy we would not even meet or think we had met.

"Did you want to have it out with him?" James asked as we walked down the stairs into the courtyard.

"Have what out?" I waved to Pierre standing at the window. "What has Pierre's wife coming to do with me?"

"Nothing at all I should say." James opened the courtyard gate. "It's you who are concerned with Pierre's wife coming."

"Are you suggesting I resent it?"

"Don't you?"

"Do I? I hardly know how to define my position." I laughed. "But why this evening?"

"Had you two arranged something definite then?"

"No. Not really. No. No." Indeed we had made no particular arrangement at all. It had never been a matter of arrangement. We just met, almost automatically. This unusual event of Pierre's wife coming to Paris opened an unpleasantly fresh focus on what had almost appeared to be the *status quo*.

"That's reality," James said. "The reality I was telling you about. Accept this whole business as a

reality, and you're properly caught. It would all become a matter of fixing things in—inbetween times. Awkward situation that would be. You'd find yourself planning. How would you like that? That's your hour and that's not for you. Carve the spare time up and distribute it evenly. A kind of nerve-wracking pastime. You're not made for it. Better break now before you become part of someone else's domestic arrangements."

"Don't be clever," I said, obstinately clinging to my misinterpretation of the matter.

In the bus which James selected as the most likely to take us to one of the outer suburbs where a fair could be found, I thought about Pierre's wife coming to see him, turning the event over in my mind as I might turn a piece of a jig-saw puzzle in my fingers. Did I wish to concentrate upon this occurrence which was unusual only because I happened to go to Pierre at a time when his wife decided to visit him. Perhaps the child was ill? No, I reasoned. She would have telephoned. Some business matter to discuss? Hardly perhaps urgent enough. A visit to the dentist which brought her to Paris. Yes, I told myself that was the reason. Country dentists were notoriously old-fashioned.

It was raining when I jumped down from the bus obeying James's "Here's one. Come on." A thin

trickling kind of rain, immeasurably irritating. There before us was the fair, sprawling its machinery and wares all over a large square. We went towards the useless music, jolted on both sides by people rushing from our bus and other vehicles towards the gas jets and shrill voices.

"Some saint's day probably," said James. "Hardly St. Catherine. Not the season. One of the lesser virgins. Any will serve a fair's purpose."

Thus we became part of the strident and flashing mobility, pushing our way through the aimless and fatuous crowd, taking on some of their vacuity, assuming some of their boisterousness, rivalling in part their determination to enjoy themselves. James won me two coconuts, one ugly Teddy bear and an ash-tray. He bought me some pink sugar foam, a bag of roasted chestnuts and a hot dog. I encouraged him to slam an enormous hammer down in order to test his strength against a group of ruffians, to have his photograph taken behind a cut-out frame of a nightmarish Eve, to sit in a small red car which raced up and down a circular frame, and to quarrel with a man who tried to pick me up.

I chose a wooden horse called Jean-Baptiste, and refused to be parted from him for at least twenty minutes, clinging to his pearly neck, thinking hard about Pierre's wife coming to Paris to the back-

ground refrain of 'The Blue Danube', 'La Vie En Rose', and surprisingly 'Tea for Two'.

"Leave me alone. Leave me alone." I snapped at James who had no head for merry-go-rounds, and stood below watching me whirl up and down and round with a grim expression. Possibly I might still be sitting on Jean-Baptiste now, but for the advent of three bright lads who thought it would be a good idea if they sat on Jean-Baptiste along with me. One can, of course, always rely on life to provide the incidents of continuity.

Perhaps it would not be true to say that I had almost stopped thinking about Pierre's wife coming to Paris by the time we had found our way to the floodlit erection grandly presented as The Hall of Mirrors.

I grabbed James's arm. "Pierre," I exclaimed, hypnotized by the sight of a man in a white raincoat, back turned against us, disappearing into the Hall of Mirrors.

"That merry-go-round has gone to your head. I thought it would." James was rather watchful.

I laughed uneasily, trying to shake off from my mind the vision of a dark head and the back of a man dressed in a white raincoat, gliding into the Hall of Mirrors.

"Let's chase him," James said, flippantly. "Now

what's the hurry," he pretended to grumble as I pushed him towards the ticket box. "Our man's in there. We've got him!"

Treated as a joke, the business was partly tolerable.

"Hey, go easy." James guided me, firmly holding my elbow as I rushed to the entrance, encountering a grey glitter of dull glass. "This way," he said, sinking down into a trap step, as we moved along the darkened confined corridors.

I hesitate to venture into any maze, am ill-at-ease in unknown corridors, and have never completely overcome my childhood fear of the dark. Into a grotesque combination of all these three anxieties did I wilfully step, with James behind me, in that ramshackle outbuilding grandiosely named the Hall of Mirrors. I touched the walls on either side, avoiding the phosphorescent mirrors in which, dimly, I saw our shrinking shadows, as we moved slowly along the trick floorboards which suddenly sank beneath us, or moaned mechanically as we trod on the lines operating the automatic sound effects.

With one arm outstretched to safeguard myself from walking into a real mirror, I plodded from corridor to corridor. A sudden light flashing bluish foam illuminated the next few yards in front of me.

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A sudden light flashing bluish foam for a few seconds, and then no more, yet giving me enough time to glimpse the back of a white raincoat. Spontaneously I rushed towards the illusion and found myself staring at my own reflection, greenish and sick and distorted by the curve of the glass and the light illuminating the mirror which barred my way. I turned round. James was not there. I screamed. "James. James," I screamed. "Get me out of here."

"There, there," he said, hardly knowing that my few seconds of waiting for him had filled my life with the experience of years. "Look," he said, pulling me to stand underneath a small blue light and opening his mouth. "See how many false teeth I have. This light is the lie detector as far as teeth go." Foolishly we looked at each other's teeth under the blue light, noting all the fillings which the phosphorescent glaze lit up from the other teeth, laughing at our antics more in relief than in spontaneous laughter.

My hand in James's, I followed him along the remaining corridors, chattering like an excited but frightened child as we passed mirror after mirror, until we came to the exit. I blinked at the lights outside. Quickly I withdrew my hand from James's as I ran towards the dark head and the white raincoat. I was faced by fat red cheeks smiling

amiably. "I'm sorry, sorry," I muttered, limp and drained of care. The illusion achieved its natural circle.

"I've lost my Teddy bear," was all that I could say to James as he stood by with his impersonal will to comfort.

"Do you want to come back with me?" James asked, as we sat in the cab which drove us from the fair to the centre of Paris. "Or shall we eat somewhere first?"

"Yes, oh yes," I said, "I'm frantically hungry. Take me to Weber's."

At Weber's there was the *chasseur* who had often delivered telephone messages from Pierre to me. Already I was expecting a telephone call. Already I had reached the frontier of experience by appointment, which, James referred to as someone else's domestic arrangements. Therefore I asked James to take me to Weber's not because I knew that there would be a telephone message for me, but simply because there now existed a possibility of such a message.

James talked almost continuously as we ate a late supper, talked continuously, bouncing a miscellaneous selection of experience on the table between us. He had left his care for me in the fairground, and sat eating, drinking, talking, and openly mock-

ing my reactions to his selected nonsense. I sat and watched the *chasseur* move from table to table.

"Enjoy yourself last night?" asked Pierre when we met the next day.

"Very much. And you?" I could hardly help it.

"I thought you might have come back last night." He sounded casual.

I expressed some surprise.

"She left soon after dinner," was all the explanation he offered. "James came in late." He sounded purposeful.

"Really?" I was stupidly pleased that he had waited up for James.

"Said he'd just left you." He sounded matter of fact.

"So he had," I remarked, which led us to a nice long pause. Then I said: "James is really very nice, isn't he?"

Pierre grunted.

"You're not a very talkative man, are you?" My tone was truculent.

He smiled with a kind of fulsome self-pleasure; "You and James do enough of that."

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"We like talking. Some take to drink. We take to words."

"Are they all necessary?"

"Not at all. That's what makes them so pleasant to play with."

"Is there anything you don't play with?" Obviously he did not care for my tone.

I returned the insult: "I'm not your type really, am I?" He looked faintly hurt. "Would you say I was more to James's taste?"

He hunched his shoulders as he always did when he felt slightly ruffled. "You would know more about that than me," he remarked.

I waited for him to put the inevitable question.

"I come from the mountains," he said, "you didn't know that, did you? I was born in a village near a lake. My father was a doctor. We left that part of the world when I was eleven. There's no other country for me. It's a place where you can breathe. I don't like Paris. I have never gone back."

"How sentimental of you," I said.

"Sentimental? Yes, I see what you mean. But it wasn't that. I accept what I find. Now James," he said.

"Yes, James?" I thought he would come back to James.

"James belongs anywhere, everywhere almost."

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"Where do I belong?" I interrupted.

"Nowhere," he was smiling.

"James anywhere. You to the mountains. And me nowhere. There's a corner missing."

"All similar magnitudes. Nothing to it!" He enjoyed his mild joke.

And then it was that I decided to resist the temptation of telling Pierre about James, because it would have meant my questioning him further about his wife, all of which would have only too obviously concurred with James's premonition of becoming part of someone else's domestic arrangements.

Dimly I was conscious that in the beginning this matter of Pierre and myself had been initiated as some independent experience, independent of all other experience.

"Do you know that once," I said to Pierre, "I thought we could keep this between us."

"Don't we?" He almost appeared surprised by my doubt.

"We're on the edge now. Soon we'll have to give in to the community."

"There you go again," he said.

"And you're not a naturally secretive man, are you?"

"Say I'm cautious."

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"Soon, don't you see, we'll spend our time together talking about the situation."

"Not yet. Not yet."

"Soon I'll be calling you smug and you'll be calling me neurotic."

"Time enough for that. Let's wait until it comes, shall we?" He touched my hand. "Impatient, aren't you?" He stood up. "Let's walk home," he said.

I remember that not so long ago I had been in the habit of using the word home.

Indeed, when I think about that time between the beginning and the end, I remember how claustrophobic it was. Our stage was limited and our performance ill-balanced between the instinctive and the automatic gesture. There we were, shuffling about with love, like players reduced to their last pack of cards. Best perhaps to forget about that time, best only to recall the bubbling excitement of the beginning, and the emotional pleasure of the end. Best to forget we had reduced the novelty to some activity verging on the tedious.

Each resolutely determined not to exchange with the other any part of our previous and separate experience, Pierre and I were only left with love. And love in such circumstances is all too soon restricted to sexual desire which, ultimately, is no barrier to the thinking mind. Our increasing

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intimacy created an increasing foreignness between us. We had no parallel life to share. At best we were boastful and vain possessors of the moment. Too often we were left with no other choice but to make love.

Moreover we had reached the stage when we hardly dared to exchange our memories or knowledge, because such an exchange would have meant facing a possibility of a decision, and that we knew was not for either of us. I can, I suppose, only speak for myself, and for myself during that time there was an edge of impatience. I know now that what I would not admit at the time was my increasing impatience to get on with my own life, and that meant escaping from the experience of Pierre and myself together. Pierre of course was more fortunately placed than I was; he had his work and his own living quarters. My only background was my hotel. I felt I was living in a *poste restante*.

Then there was Paris where I, a lopsided tourist, lingered through the hot summer months, waiting for September to come and fill the city with its proper number of Parisians. Some time, I told myself as I walked along the boulevards, the English will go home.

Indeed, the temptation to forget about that time is great. An irksome and fundamentally uncomfortable

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able time which is almost easy to forget but for the fact of James being part of it. A James who was indefinably changing from a man who did not matter to someone who had assumed a responsible role. I do not mean that personally James mattered any differently. He did not. The impression I had, and I cannot rate it higher than an impression, was that Jamès; the entity of James, had been waiting, waiting to step into his proper place in this affair of love. I realised then that I had been expecting, anticipating the logical development to the pattern. I had been anticipating, although I had half-hoped that I should not see the design so clearly.

It was James, of course, who made the situation's stalemate so evident. I might be fanciful and say that James acted as a crooked measuring rod to the repeated performances of experience I shared with Pierre and Pierre shared with me. Crooked in the sense that James suggested neither commendation nor condemnation. His function was purely representational, but his function was obvious. He was our sole witness. As such his power was indisputable. That he did not personally wield his power neither lessened nor qualified the force of it. It was sufficient that James, whom none would voluntarily call as witness, was our witness.

"Telling me what I shall do and feel if and when

at some time," I snapped at James. "What do you think you are? A blasted prophet? Yes, I suppose prophets were men like you. Presumptuous chatters caring not a damn either way."

"They certainly had no sense of guilt." James was always pat.

I laughed.

"None at all. Believe me." Quite openly he loved his own ideas. "They could do without guilt. So can I. As far as I am concerned all experience is just one set of facts. It's your kind of person who starts the trouble. You get the wind up. You cover up. That's all your philosophy boils down to. Anxiety. The jitters. Call it what you like. Call it psychological. You're bunking all the time. The prophets were simple chaps. They dealt with facts. What they said was so damned simple that you people interpret it as mysticism. Is there anything you don't explain away?"

"You're just a bully," I said, leaving the matter like that, because in part my accusation was true. James was the anonymous bully forcing me to cling to what I knew must ultimately have some kind of end.

"Tell me, sweetie," James asked, "how will you live when you are rid of Pierre and me?"

"I'll take it easy," I said.

"Think you can settle down?"

I let him have some of the truth. "I'm the kind of person who needs in some measure to settle. I'm neither as brave nor as presumptuous as you. I can't live alone. I have to have some sort of a resting place and a set of habits. I also need quite a few people I can love and respect. Odd isn't it to think how I'm wasting my time at the moment. This migration, James," I was, I hope, mocking myself in some measure, "doesn't fit me too well. I wear my irresponsibility too uneasily. And neither you nor Pierre would or could teach me otherwise."

"But we've taught you that, haven't we? Taught you all this was tricky?" As ever he was pleased with his contribution.

"No." I was firm. "Not even that. I've always known it was tricky. I've always known how it all was. That's the trouble. I was born knowing about irresponsibility. It wasn't something I picked up on my way. It was the last thing they threw in to my cradle. Ever it's been my danger. Pierre has never known it. In concrete terms it means nothing to him. You know all about it, but you can handle it. Or rather is it, James, that you pass the buck?"

"I only pass the ball," he said.

I should have known he would have had his answer ready.

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"Difference between us," he said, "is that you're ambitious. I'm not. I haven't like you have any little set of ready-made values. That's what trips you up. You've gone in for some of those principles people throw about. You think some people are better than you. I don't give a damn about the value of someone round the corner. If he comes my way then I deal with him. But Christ preserve me from the thinking gang. They think themselves out of life most of the time. I like life. It's one swine of a game but I like it. You sit and think about what it means. That's how you're caught. That's where your ambition gets you. You get thrown to the lions."

"Do you really believe what you're saying?" I asked, although I knew he would say that he did.

"I don't even go as far as that," he boasted.

"And how far, my dearest, do you go?" I asked Pierre that night because time was using us both up so quickly.

"Go?" It was almost a habit with Pierre this taking

up the question put to him. Almost a professional reaction.

"With life, dear one. With time, dear one. With knowledge, dear one." I offered him a choice of worlds.

"I use them all," he said.

"But whose life? Whose time? Whose knowledge?" I insisted.

"Yours at the moment," he teased.

"What about your own?"

"Purely functional." He smiled. "I'm an awfully boring chap. Haven't you found that out yet?"

"You'd better be careful," I teased back. "You'll get smug."

"I'm the accommodating type. You'll miss me if you leave me. I've no neurosis, except you. Without you I'm quite ordinary. Why," his voice was almost serious, "why me?"

"Why you?" I chose to repeat the question before I gave him his answer. "Because you're such an ordinary man. You appeal to my sense of humour, and your hair is so straight. All my friends," I said, "have curly hair."

"You must have a lot of terrible friends," he said, putting his arms around me again.

"Lots and lots of terrible friends," I said.

"Don't, don't ask me to meet them."

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"I promise," I said.

Thus did we keep ourselves apart.

The next day I bought a coloured picture-postcard. There was a white kitten with a pink bow round its neck sitting in the middle surrounded by four famous Parisian landmarks: the Eiffel Tower, the Sacré Cœur, Nôtre Dame and the Opera House. It was the card most in demand. I sat in a bistro off les Halles and wrote on the back of my card: *The tourist season is ending. I think I am trapped. The weather has been fine and we've had some rain.* I addressed it, bought a stamp, and dropped it in the first letter-box I came to after leaving the bistro. It was the one and only card I sent from Paris.

"Would you like to see my house?" Pierre once asked me, and there I was, some thirty miles from Paris, looking at it, and really I might have been in England, because apart from the shutters, dim dusty green shutters, it was not unlike a number of

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English houses some thirty or forty miles from London.

Pierre had given me the address and no further instructions. He did not know, and was indeed never to know, that I had taken the train which doubtless so many times he had travelled in, and there I was, rather lightheaded and vaguely ill at ease, strolling towards the neat frontage of a smallish house badly in need of paint.

For what purpose had I come to this rather uninteresting hamlet? Not for the river which was pretty enough, very similar to the Thames as it winds its way through Marlow, Henley and Maidenhead. I realised it was here that Pierre rowed. What could this dull house tell me? What indeed did I wish it to convey?

How did Pierre walk along this street? Was it the slightly hunched-up quick step that I knew so well? Or did he move slowly, cautiously? And how many people did he nod to on his way from the station to this unremarkable house? What shops did he enter? Tobacco? Cigarettes? Newspapers? Doubtless these were automatic purchases. Should I make them? Follow in Pierre's footsteps if only because I wished to know so much about him?

Could I feel as he did proffering money to the elderly gentle woman into whose shop he must

surely go, whenever he wished to buy a newspaper? She appeared surprised to see me, surprised because I was a stranger to the district. Pierre she would accept before he stepped through into her darkened shop; instinctively her hand would reach for his particular brand of tobacco, and perhaps she might even know when he required more matches. And what intimate questions would she ask him? 'How was Mrs. Pierre? And how was the little girl?' She would probably hardly need to ask Pierre these questions, because obviously such news would be her general knowledge, and the general knowledge of all who lived so near to Pierre's house.

I know him, I could have said to her. I know exactly how he hesitates a little before he rises from a chair, as though not quite certain about the efficacy of his balance. I know how sometimes, particularly when he is nervous about me, he will try and hide his mouth, because small though that scar at the right corner is, it worries him a little. I know him too, I could have said to the old woman in the shop, said to her who must often have seen Pierre leading the little girl past the window. Perhaps she smiled because Pierre with a child would seem so much taller than he actually was, and large would be his hand as it was given over to the care of a child.

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I know him too, I could have said, and told her that when he was tired he was able to close his eyes and sleep immediately like a dog, and how when he sleeps one had time to notice how very uneven his eyebrows are. "You wear them *à la brosse*," I told him and he had explained that he had grown up with them and they with him. But possibly the grey-haired, soft-voiced shop-woman had noticed Pierre's eyebrows ever since he was a little boy, and my observation was later than hers.

'And do you know,' I might have added, 'that he has one most annoying habit? Do you know that he keeps his shoes in the kitchen?' 'But he doesn't at home,' she would have replied, because obviously in that house all shoes would be carefully put away and not scattered about the kitchen, asking strangers to trip over them. Then, at home obviously there were rarely any strangers to cause Pierre to rush into the kitchen, razor in hand, to tell them, as he told me, not to sprinkle eau-de-Cologne over the bathroom floor.

'And do you know,' I might have added as I was about to leave the shop, 'that it occurs to me that he has less hair in one armpit than under the other?'

And here was the street and the house, and here I was but why I did not know. Inside that house was a woman and a child and possibly a servant of some

kind. They were Pierre's as Pierre was theirs, as Pierre was mine, and I was Pierre's, and so we were linked this street, this house, this woman, this child, Pierre and myself.

Somewhere else there was another house to which I was linked though I was far away from it, and standing in that unfamiliar street I might have cried if the door of the house had not opened, and a child and a woman walked out. I fumbled in my handbag and looked as though I was searching for a paper. As they passed me I saw them, and something in me did weep, because neither the child nor the woman was above the commonplace. For Pierre I had wanted the woman to be bright and pretty and possibly alert; for Pierre I had wanted the child to be lovely. They were silent and sullen and like so many other women and other children.

The way back to Paris was the kind of journey one takes in a dream where many known and half-known faces crowd upon one, and voices that do not belong to the faces utter ordinary comments which make no particular sense, and yet which possess a peculiar significance.

I knew it was a foolish and useless thing that I had done to walk down a street to view a house in which I never wished to live.

I arrived back in Paris with the first evening dark-

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ness, which lent a mistiness to the station not yet attuned to the glare of lights. At the station I lost my sense of direction, dazzled by the frenzy of crowds rushing from all sides. Temporarily my equilibrium was impaired. I could hardly focus my vision, beset as I was on all sides by the purposeful community which I then reacted against, as I would react against a purposeful enemy out to track me down.

I stumbled clumsily through the animated bodies, avoiding the arms, the legs, the voices, all instinctively resenting my intrusion, all instinctively wishing to destroy me if only because I would not, in the midst of all this communal purposefulness, attach myself to any part of it. I alone was going nowhere. I alone, among these hundreds of bodies, was without direction.

The attack upon me was communal, coming at me from every side, in several overpowering flanking movements, aimed at my ultimate destruction. Faces peered into mine, voices rushed about my ears, bodies hurtled straight at me, arms jabbed me, feet kicked against mine. I knew my time of panic.

I dared not stand still. I shuffled from left to right, from right to left. I could see the tops of heads, the abrupt turnings and twistings of bodies, relentlessly rotating around me in some pattern of

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perpetual mobility. Above my head were steel girders and glass and the vapours of smoke from dozens of engines. And intermingled with the strident alien voices, was the sound of rasping wheels, and the pitiless background rhythm of machinery.

I knew no way of escape. Before me lay the uncharted territory of those who have forsaken their natural boundaries. I was consciously on the edge of hysteria, and yet sufficiently controlled to anticipate how easily trampled I should be, if I submitted to pure physical defeat. This was my time of nightmare. I made the final desperate effort which we make in a choking dream. I strained forward and found my symbol. There it was just above the level of my eyes—the clock, a holy testimonial to my particular share of the communal security. In moving towards it I extricated myself from the devouring tendrons of the too certain community.

The streets outside the station assumed, by contrast, a soothing familiarity. Here people loitered, paused to look about them, stopped to consider the best possible way leading to their destinations. I made for the nearest café, bought an evening newspaper which I handled as though I were moderately interested in the significance of its headlines, and

sipped thick black coffee. I had been frightened. Frightened by a force which frightens even the sturdiest who walks by himself. I was unnerved by the ruthless evidence of collectivity, which forces each of us to acknowledge its prior claims above the individual for survival. At such times the defence mechanism produces a counteractive which is expressed in a desire for integration.

I shivered. Fear had left me with an inner clamminess. My hands were cold. I ordered more coffee. From the next table a matronly middle-aged woman smiled at me; briefly, no more, but it was enough. This smile, impersonal yet comforting, coming as it did from a woman surrounded by part of her family—husband, son, daughter—was able to restore to me some of the equilibrium I had lost in the station.

I wanted more. I looked towards the woman, but she had forgotten about me and was busy chattering to her family. Even so, the sight of her sitting there, barely two paces away, engulfed in her particular group identification, was reassuring. So influential is the aftermath of panic that I, at that moment, loved this ordinary matron, this obvious mother, wife and comforter; I loved this exponent of family loyalty and family continuity. Commonplace she might be, but to me, at that moment, she appeared

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as an enviable creature I had perforce to honour, if only because she had, with her casual smile, offered me the balm of association. I looked at the people passing, hope simmering behind my fixed gaze, concerned only with the establishment of some kind of relationship with all that was communal and commonplace.

In the station, emotionally exhausted after my useless and foolish visit to Pierre's house, I had known what it might feel like to be hunted by the tribe. I had come up against the pack, trespassed with my inability to participate, stood aimlessly in the hunter's tracks. Sitting in the café was my time of respite. Soon I should have to rise and join that stream of passing people; soon I should have to move among them, and before I did, I knew it was essential that I be able to walk with the crowd as though I also belonged.

I could not risk another moment of inattention, which is what we do when suddenly, consciously, we become the stranger in the midst. Physically the symptoms resemble those when, through indigestion, or over-exertion, we miss a heart's beat, enduring an agony of anxiety in that fraction of time preceding the return of the regular pressure and pace. I had to go towards that crowd, camouflaged too as were the people in it, with the recognizable

trappings of anonymity. Having been frightened by the crowd I needed to be accepted by it. So it was that, through the freakish accident of emotional cramp, I came to consider the commonplace.

If you have, and you most probably have, sat alone at an ordinary café facing the Gare St. Lazare at that time of darkening evening when everyone is concentrated upon a particular activity, whether direct or oblique, you will understand how it is, sitting there all alone as I was with no one in mind to meet, that loneliness acquires a meaning.

At one of the cafés facing the station this loneliness has a potency, which could easily be ignored if sitting alone at almost any other café in one of the busy quarters of Paris. At the Deux Magots, for instance, you would not sit alone for long, nor indeed would you feel such self-pity were you sitting at one of the garishly decorated Champs-Élysées cafés and at any small bar off the Place Vendôme you would be able, at least, to engage the fluent bartender in intimate shrivelled bar-conversation. At night, a café facing a main station is a place to be avoided if one is alone, and is miserable to the depth of ordering, as I did, lots of black coffee. Loneliness, a slovenly misery, takes over.

At such times one is only too ready to deny all those minor independencies which create the most

necessary vanity of an identifiable individuality. At such times even the most single-minded will eventually fall into the trap, and will attempt to drive loneliness away as clumsily as I did, by deliberate association with those who pass, with those who sit near, and through them to reach an association with the commonplace. In linking oneself to them, as I did, and through such mischievous means, you will, in some measure, manage to convince yourself that the burden of loneliness is a shared one, since so much else is shared.

These people have homes you will say, and so have I. These people have dear ones to whom they are responsible and who are responsible to them, and so have I. These people have work which they will attend to, and so have I. You will, if you are not careful, go even further with this particular mischief and tell yourself that these people have arms, legs, eyes to see with, ears to listen with and voices which they can use. Thus will you wallow, as I did, in the commonplace, which is what we all do when we fear what some call the high-falutin' way of reasoning, and play the more poisonous low-falutin' line instead.

I have always considered that it is extremely dangerous to dabble below one's natural mental capacity. Better to commit a thousand errors on

the high count—at least some effort, however misguided it might prove, is the more honourable. To crawl as I did then, sitting at a café facing the Gare St. Lazare, to the level of all men, my hands outstretched, requesting some part of their commonalty, was to be counted among my minor shames. But crawl I did, most abjectedly, beseechingly absurd, asking the common man to share his level with me, who, in my saner prideful moments, know that both he and I are far above the common level.

I did indeed think about my home, consider my dear ones and wonder about my work—all of which I had almost forgotten during those eight days with Pierre before James returned from Vienna. It was inevitable that I should think, consider and wonder about them again. I knew as well as anyone when that time was drawing near as indeed it was.

“Lost again?” a voice asked.

I looked up and there was James.

“Is it really you, James? Or do I keep on imagining you? So handy. So ready at the right moment.”

“Going to buy me some dinner?” He sat down next to me.

“How did you know I was hungry?”

“Hunger is something I really know about.

Watched it all over Europe. Seen some of it in Asia. Guzzling my way through it on a Press pass. Can't see hunger unless you're well fed. If you're starving you don't give a damn about hunger. You sit until you rot or until someone opens a soup kitchen under your nose. Christ!" he exclaimed. "How'd we get on to this?"

"Quite logical sequence of thought," I said. "Before you came I was swimming in lovely large messy terms."

"Get you anywhere?"

"Don't know. Was interrupted. By you."

We laughed.

"Let's get behind the glass and eat some of their choucroute garnie. I'd like to give you a cheap meal. It would make such a change," James said, as he guided me from the café terrace to the café proper.

"Hope I'm not costing you too much," I said, as he ordered a carafe of vin ordinaire.

"Funny about you," James remarked. "You always cost a man a packet for your meals and yet you say you're simple. Tell me what you were doing staring at the Gare St. Lazare?"

"Just come from it," I said, and then I told him about my visit to Pierre's house and my panic at the station.

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"That's what I keep on telling you," he said.

"Telling me what?"

"That you can't take it. You can't take this. You'll have to give it up."

"Give what up?" I was more than interested.

"Give Pierre up. Go home." He paused and grinned. "Give me up."

"Give you up?" I stressed this.

"Ducky, be sensible. Having Pierre is having me. We go together. One way or another we'll always go together."

"Meaning?" I asked, although I knew only too well what he meant.

"Meaning, sweetie, that you've got to face it at some time or other."

"Now?"

"Listen, we both know what we are talking about. It's statistical. You alone. Then you and Pierre. Then me. You and me and Pierre. The three of us. That's how it worked out. That's uneven. One of us has to go. Pierre can't. I'll always return. It's you, ducky."

"Why should I go?"

"I think you will." He paused. "Mind you I'd like you to stay. So would Pierre. But can you?"

"How d'you mean—can I?"

"You belong somewhere, don't you? You'll get

homesick some time. We all do. Stay here with me. Stay with Pierre. Neither will alter the fact that you belong somewhere, don't you, ducky?"

"Well." I began to remember the place, the people, the work.

"Think I want to get rid of you?" He was laughing in his way.

"Well, I might be a responsibility. Think of the expensive dinners."

"I've got interested. Not that you care."

"Don't fish," I said. "James, you must be wrong because I have taken it."

"Have you? Like that?" He snapped his fingers to show what he meant.

"Is that the only way I could take it?"

"Yes. The only way. And that's why you can't. You can't not care." He was blissfully self-confident.

"If I were a man," I said to James, because, then, I had to reply in a way to James's attack, "you wouldn't think my behaviour odd or out of character. You would accept my coming to Paris as I have. You would understand. Men so often pick up an odd love affair. That a woman—a woman who is neither a prostitute nor a nymphomaniac—should decide—quite simply—to pick up a man. That shocks you. Yes, even shocks you. And that furthermore the woman should not excuse herself—that is worrying.

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You—even you with your lack of all moralities—can't take it. How odd that is!"

"I don't know what you had in mind when you started all this," he was saying; "but I know it went against you in the sense that it didn't follow up as easily as you thought it would. Why did you start it? Want to do someone dirt?"

"Was just alone," I said, rather meekly really, considering James's bumptiousness.

"So you threw up love and got yourself mucked up again?"

"Who said I threw up love?"

"Well, didn't you?"

"I went away." I decided to temporize.

I could not sleep that night nor could I read time away. I smoked and paced about the room, telling myself I was suffering from indigestion, that the choucroute dinner with James had not agreed with me. I opened the long windows and looked out. The night air was warm, inviting. I lost my tiredness, excited by the silky insidious undertone of the night. I dressed and went out, surprising the night porter when I handed him my room key.

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I do not remember how long I walked. An hour, two hours, some time in between. I felt wondrously alert and new, shining with the freshness of being alone and alive and walking while so many slept. Women, they say, do not walk at night; only men may be granted this pleasure in the general convention. Women who walk at night are mostly prostitutes who do not in fact walk at all, when it comes to walking as I did along the Paris boulevards, cutting through side-streets, revelling in the sensuality of walking at night.

I will, I must indeed, walk about any city in which I find myself at night. Then only can I begin to know it. Then only can I become in some way attached to the city; find myself an integral part of its stone and the patterned movement. An intimacy is created between us, the city and myself. I may leave it when day comes, may not return to it for some long time, but when I do return, I return with that knowing smile behind the eyes which we keep for old loves, and which says without words 'I know you'. Moreover, this knowledge of intimate acquaintanceship is always there; let the city be named and immediately within is that special smile.

Paris has a special night appeal for the solitary walker. Rome is equally stimulating, as is Venice in a lesser degree, during those after-midnight hours

when one most responds to the pulse of a city. I thought about London which I know so well, and whose streets I have also walked, long after most people have returned home. London also can satisfy when the streets are mostly deserted and lights are extinguished from window after window.

I remember thinking as I walked towards the Seine that the people were fortunate who were able to walk under trees, because coming from London one notices those trees which Parisians probably accept as a matter as fundamental as the stone of their bridges. People who walk under trees are fortunate people, because trees add grace to life, and those who daily move about with their lives under trees must take on some of the quality of compassion which trees give. We should, I remember thinking, plant trees in every street in the world, then we should spread a certain tenderness as well as a certain kind of gaiety, because about trees there is a distinct note of gaiety. Tender and gay would the world become then, I remember thinking, as I realised I was standing in the courtyard leading to Pierre's apartment.

He was rather slow opening his door, and I laughed at him as he stood, blinking a little, pulling at the cord of his dressing-gown.

"What on earth?" he asked, which I suppose is

exactly what I would have said at a similar time, although I was rather disappointed, in view of my walking drunkenness, that he did not utter some more romantic greeting.

"I needed to see you," I said.

"Is anything wrong?" Pierre held my shoulders as though he could better examine me.

"Nothing. I've told you. I wanted to see you." I laughed at him because he was peering anxiously at me. His black hair stood out absurdly above his ears, as though he had been sleeping face buried in the pillows.

"What time is it?" he muttered, glancing at his wrist-watch. "Good God! What on earth are you doing out at this hour?"

"Walking," I said.

"Walking?" He was almost worried.

"Yes, darling. Walking. Walking, walking, walking, until I came to your door."

"But why didn't you telephone?" Then as if to apologise for such an out of time and place question, he began offering me brandy, coffee, cigarettes, even food.

I walked about the room, feeling wonderfully tired and yet exhilarated.

"I needed to see you," I explained. "Can't you accept that?"

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He came closer, hesitated before he spoke, appeared to change his mind about what he intended to say, sat me down in his large arm-chair and said: "You look tired."

Silently, with soft concerned movements, he lit a cigarette for me and brought me a small glass of brandy. He sat on the floor looking up at me.

"If there is anything wrong you will tell me, won't you?"

I smiled to reassure him that there was no need for him to be concerned, since there was nothing which was in any way worrying.

"I wanted to look at you," I said.

I remember only that I did then indeed feel enormously tired, and I believe that Pierre was smiling at me with that veiled smile of his which I knew so well, as he put his arms about me and told me to go to sleep.

Meet me at Weber's I wrote on the note which I left on the shelf with the tooth-glass, the packet of razor blades, the bottles of brillantine, eau-de-Cologne and after-shave lotion in Pierre's bathroom.

"See you when?" Pierre attempted rather half-heartedly to get up from the bed.

"Soon," I replied, pushing him back on to the pillows, letting my hand stray for a few seconds on the hard neck-bone.

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"You need some more air in here," I said, giving myself the excuse of viewing the room once again from the window, as I wanted to, because even then I must have told myself that I would not see that room again.

Outside the sky was smudged with pinkish gleaming traces of morning sun, although some stars were still visible white specks, remote and high above the earth. The air smelt good, wonderfully unpolluted by human activity, and here and there great yellow rays streaked earthwards towards another bright summer morning.

Into that clear morning day I was about to go, leaving behind that room, still night-bound, where my vision encountered the shape of commonplace articles made indeterminate by the diffused light of dawn.

If it had been possible, in some magical way, to have taken the bright day breaking outside the window and to have spread its freshness about that room, there is no doubt that I should still be there looking at Pierre. The line of decision was too obvious.

"Don't go yet. It's too early." Pierre's voice was a choking kind of mumble. His eyes were closed. One streak of early morning sunlight fell across the bed illuminating a line from elbow to wrist. I

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remember thinking about it as I went out of that room towards the front door.

Indeed, the vision remained with me all the way down the stairs. Only when I was standing in the courtyard, slightly stunned by the impact of the increasingly active day, did the vision of the crisply fine hairs on Pierre's arm, glittering golden under the sun's yellow ray, leave my eyes. And as I walked from the courtyard into the street, I left behind me bone, muscle, and flesh from elbow to wrist, and my time to keep.

I think I had anticipated the telegram. So often we provoke our own climaxes: almost a matter of electrical generation. At a certain moment we induce a resultant power to match our intention. Heat will cause the liquid in the bowl to rise. It is a question of time. A time to every purpose. I had had my time to keep. This was my time to rend.

I accepted the telegram without surprise which the night porter handed to me with my room key. I took the blue envelope as though I had expected it just at that moment, as though some hours before I had left the hotel only to reach this moment of

acceptation. As though, in fact, I had walked the Paris streets at night only to bring about this obvious climax to my eventual return to the hotel.

"I should like my coffee now," I said to the porter.

The telegram was brief. *Come Home* it read.

About four hours later I picked up the telephone and asked the operator to connect me with Air France. The simplicity of the operation was moderately stimulating. During the morning I telephoned James at his office.

"Thought I'd like to say good-bye."

"Going?" He sounded a long way off.

"Yes."

"O.K., ducky," he said. "See you some time."

I'm going home, I told myself as I walked towards the midday hour and Weber's café, which is a spell we weave when we are leaving a time to keep behind, because we have reached our time to rend. And how surprised we are, at such times, to find that neither the people in the familiar street nor the street itself, express, in any way, some sensory appreciation about our intended departure.

I was alone with my departure. No one would share it with me. My handbag fell to the ground. There was a rush of people bending suddenly to help me pick up the scattered articles. Someone handed me my Air France ticket. I looked up. There were

several faces but none conscious of my departure. My ticket had not been noticed. I had no option but to replace it carefully in the handbag's largest pocket. I felt slightly cheated. I wished at least one of these passing strangers to share my departure. I crossed the rue Royale towards Weber's.

Pierre was sitting there. He was wearing the navy-blue suit he wore when we first met. I glanced at his waistcoat. "Yes," I said, "it's definitely too tight."

He grinned back at me, remembering too our first meeting. He ordered drinks and then, in the tone of any café sitter reading a headline to a companion, Pierre said: "I've been wondering how you'd say good-bye."

"Perceptive, aren't you?" I smiled back at him.

He toasted me slightly as he lifted his glass. "When women start to write to their lovers it's the beginning of the end."

"Quite a knack you have for facile generalizations." I raised my glass to him.

"Shall I try persuasion?" he queried.

"Persuasion?" I was purposefully puzzled.

"I'm not the type really, of course, but for old times' sake I might try my hand." He caught at a passing waiter and ordered more drinks. "Why not stay?"

"I'm going back," I said.

"Back? Where's that?" he asked.

"Where it was before you."

"You mustn't get habit-bound. It suits me. I was made for habit. You don't fit habit."

I looked at him, noticing, as I always noticed with a mild pleasure, how very black his hair was, and how straight and upright the sweep from the brow. "You've become a kind of habit."

"How you going to break yourself of it?" He leant forward quickly. "Don't go." His voice was urgent.

We stared at each other.

"I'd better have your address." Pierre brought out his diary.

"Why?"

"Might want to write." There was a slight strain about his smile as he waited for me to give him my address.

"No letters," I said.

"Telegrams then?" He attempted to coax me.

"No." I grew suddenly angry. "No letters. No letters," I said. "I hate letters."

Between us there are no letters and no entries in diaries carefully locked away. Only a few weeks, a few months of having loved together in the present, of having let life come at us, knowing it would go from us to some other combination of love and

desire and anger and hatred and bitterness and joy. It hardly matters which emotion is listed first; all belong to a common family.

No letters which is, in many ways, quite a remarkable accomplishment in any love affair. In my heart and in the very core of what makes me breathe and know, there is a great, I should rather say gargantuan bitterness towards love letters, if only because I know how easily these pour out from lover to lover.

Guard me, I cry to my private god of living, from love letters, if only because I know that the writer of them will continue sending them to others after me, sending them to others while I am still receiving them. I resent the ease, the suppleness of love letters, written by those professional enchanters of this world, with a native cunning made almost perfect in craftsmanship by practice.

I have been victimized by love letters. Being especially susceptible to their corruption, one might almost say I was created to provide what every love-letter writer requires, namely despair.

How describe such despair? How select just those English words which alone can circumscribe my particular bitterness? How transmit, to even the most perceptive and sympathetic, my agony, when confronted by love letters not intended for me? At such times I have wondered at the vengeful

hatred that love contains when put to such a simple test. So much so, that long afterwards, as I utter tender assurances of love, simultaneously remembering letters which were not written to me, I have been able to invest the deadliest hatred into the most fervent declaration of love.

So, between Pierre and myself there are no love letters; consequently I am not distressed at the thought that he might write such letters to other women. In this way I shall remember him with infinite tenderness, having no cause to wish him ill, or to wish others ill because of him. And in an odd sort of way I am happy because no love letters from me lie in one of his drawers, no letter which might possibly disturb his life apart from me. Once or twice the temptation to write to Pierre almost trapped me into a committal of phrases.

'Dearest Pierre' I should have written; or would I have been more knowingly adult, and merely begun with 'Pierre my dear', or simply 'Pierre'? And, having begun the rondel of such a memorial, should I have thanked him, as love-letter writers do, for the infinite bliss of sleeping with him? Should I, true to the classical rules of the game, have delicately but dictatorially insisted that such an experience, among similar experiences in my life, was so 'superbly right'?

With such an assurance before his conscious mind, Pierre would surely remember me with a particular care and devotion; remember me long after his physical desire for me had slackened, if only because I had, in stating how striking in quality our love-making was, contributed to his sexual vanity and consequently guaranteed the continuance of his regard for me. Easily indeed could I have written this, since most love-letter writers cannot avoid the banal declaration, and often continue to insist upon stressing it in various pretty phrases, finding perhaps some consolation in retrospective glorification.

In so writing I should, in common with the experience of other love-letter writers, have benefited, since such phrases would surely have brought me, from time to time, just those deliciously insinuating words from Pierre, inserted here and there, with infinite care and deliberate intention, in the letters he might write me in the future when both of us fully agreed on the platonic aspects of our relationship. Then, months later, I could enjoy the minor pleasures resulting from the soft little phrase which our then 'ordinary' friendly letters would contain. 'I miss you.' 'I want to see you'—innocuously planted among the deliberate flat tones, these phrases would have allowed me to forget we had once reached a stalemate.

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Being human, I do occasionally regret there are no love letters between Pierre and myself. I am sad that no folded envelopes, containing the scent of past vows, exist which I could place between my handkerchiefs, which I need hardly notice if only because I knew they were there. Occasionally, reared along with the commonplace romanticisms, I do regret my lack of folded paper covered with Pierre's small cramped handwriting, since they would serve the added purpose of possibly disturbing someone else's equanimity. With these at my disposal, I could join in the jolly game of snap-blackmail which lovers play, offering my testimonials as others might offer theirs to me.

But between Pierre and myself there are no love letters. Neither has so degraded the other; degraded, since, being in our middle thirties, we both know we shall use phrases we exchanged between us with other people, and knowing how others have used the same phrases they give so splendidly to us, I am glad we have escaped from the tortuousness of love letters.

"We can do without letters," I said to Pierre. "We'll do without letters and keep this."

"When are you going?"

I lost some of my courage. "I don't know. Soon," I said. In my handbag there was the Air France ticket.

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"Will you come back?"

"To Paris? Oh yes."

"No," he spoke sharply. "To me?"

"You mightn't be here."

"But you'll always know how to find me, won't you? Won't you?"

"Yes. Yes. I'll know."

"Meet me here at six tonight?" he said.

"At six?" I was amused by the thought. "You asked me that before. Not so long ago."

"If you go now," he said, "you'll think of all the questions you wanted to ask me still. You're always asking me questions."

"Am I?"

"Do my answers help you?"

"Help me?"

"Yes, to decide one way or the other what you are always deciding." He paused. "Whatever you are deciding."

"I'm deciding nothing."

"Nothing? What about your going away?"

"That's not a decision. That's an inevitability."

"Why do you ask so many questions?"

"I want to know."

"About me?"

"Yes. In a way. But it's more than that. Don't you want to know?"

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"But I do know."

"How absurd!" I laughed.

"I'm a simple man. I accept what happens to me."

"So do I." I made my protest.

"Questioning all the time?" From Pierre it was less a question than a statement.

There we were, sitting at Weber's in the rue Royale, at the hour of the aperitif, with the sun warming our faces, and the wondrous sensuousness of midday activity in Paris. There we sat together who only some time back had sat apart. There we looked at each other with some kind of knowledge, where previously only speculation had existed.

"Leave me here alone, and please," I was very serious, "wave to me when you reach the newspaper kiosk."

"I shall be here at six," he said, as though he were repeating the line.

"Some time—some time," I said, because the moment demanded a certain frivolity; "you must tell me all about what you call the high-falutin' chemicals. I don't know how I can continue to live without knowing."

"Some time—some time," he answered, "you must tell me that you love me."

I could hardly stand it. "There's so much time," I said.

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I gave myself a last minor pleasure. I looked straight into his grey eyes. I have been told that one simply cannot look straight into any eyes; nevertheless this illusion is among my last impressions of Pierre.

I remember he paid the waiter, I remember that he stood up, I remember that he touched my hand and then that he walked away. I remember that he did pause as he reached the kiosk, that he turned slightly and waved. It was a lovely wave. I remember thinking that it was a lovely wave for, was it an hour that I continued to sit at Weber's? Automatically I sat on, ordering coffee, until I realised that most of the other café sitters had left and that a certain emptiness was in the street—most of the people were at luncheon.

An hour is not very long, does not take up too much time, and then I hardly noticed time until I realised that the street was filling again with people and traffic, and it was then time for me to leave Weber's to the afternoon café callers.

I became caught up in the returning crowd, and began to look at the shop windows, which activity soon acquired a reality. During that early afternoon, I walked out of the bookshop in the rue St. Honoré, carrying a flat thinnish parcel. I had bought the lithograph of Sarah Bernhardt.

Clutching my present because then I knew it was a present I had bought, I rushed from shop to shop, collecting an assortment of small gifts, which we all bring home to our loved ones and dearest friends when we have been away. Then a conventional kind of panic overtook me, utterly dissimilar to my panic at the Gare St. Lazare. This second panic was very ordinary. I realised I had forgotten the time, and that my shopping had led me astray, that I must return quickly to my hotel, pack and rush into a taxi to the Gare des Invalides, in order to comply with the neatly-printed departure instructions on my Air France ticket.

Taxis, all engaged, rushed past me. I leapt to the safety of street islands, endeavouring to attract one empty taxi. I waved my parcels above my head, collided with several people who laughed at my evident taxi hunting. I tried to enlist a policeman's help, and was sternly although courteously, reprimanded for holding up the traffic—as though anything less than an atom bomb could hold up the Paris traffic. I lost my power of focusing. The scene curved before me like the view on which one looks down from the big wheel at the funfair. The noise roared at me—voices, hooters, gears changing, brakes screeching. The summer heat exhausted me. At last I collapsed into a taxi and,

in so doing, I remembered I had not thought about waving good-bye to Weber's.

There is something unutterably reassuring about the *salle d'attente* in the Gare des Invalides. With my papers and my magazines and my packets of gauloises bought at the last moment, I sat beatifically composed waiting for the anonymous announcer's voice, which would eventually inform me, as it was then informing others with different destinations, that passengers on Route B Flight for London must get themselves ready for the car which would drive them to the airport. Passengers for Cairo. Passengers for Geneva. Passengers for Nice. So it went on, the announcer's voice, meticulously concerned for all our cares.

I was filling up my embarkation card when James came striding through the swing doors straight up to me. He placed the roses on the table.

"Remember you once said you liked them? What about a calvados?" He sat down next to me.

"Said good-bye?" he asked, as he gulped his drink.

"In a way. Yes. Yes. I've said good-bye."

"Pity we met as we did," he said.

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"Why?"

"Well," he grinned in his lazy way, "might have been different."

"Nonsense!" I couldn't stand any more raw intimacy.

"Know where to find me, don't you?"

I nodded.

He put one of his large hands on mine, gently—a comforting warmth was in his fingers.

"Going to be all right?"

"Meaning?" I was slightly aggressive.

"Meaning when you get back to what you're getting back to." He looked at me. His pale blue eyes were almost to my liking. "I've a vague idea, you know."

"About what?" I felt flat, and the roses on the table were sparkling.

"Skip it. Never mind, ch?"

"James," I held his fingers; "Thank you, James, for a lot."

"Friends, ducky?" He was smiling.

"Yes, James, yes." I felt happier—almost gay.

The announcer's voice came through. We both listened. James helped me to rise from my chair. He placed the roses in my arms, and no other word but place can describe this momentary gentleness in James.

"Take care of yourself, ducky. Take care," he said.

A few minutes, and then I was being helped into the waiting air-car.

Travel by air and you abandon all responsibility. The change from car to plane is an almost imperceptible activity. A last fleeting view of the place de la-Concorde, and then the streets leading to the outer suburbs and the factory district. Tabac-café. Boucherie. Charbons, Bois, Vins. Charcuterie. Pâtisserie. Pharmacie. Pneus Michelin. A series of labels floating like small balloons across the vision. A faint smell of dust. Trams. Café-Tabac. Charbons, Bois, Vins. Another salle d'attente, and then a familiar face—the steward.

"Bonsoir, madame," followed by all the routine of the plane rising, the lighted notices requesting attention to safety-belts, the no-smoking warning; the whole improbability of modern transport—improbable, because it is so very unobtrusive and yet so merciless.

On the rack, above my head, were James's roses. I knew they were there, although I did not so much as glance towards them during that hour, in which I occupied myself with the picnic-dinner, drank the cocktail, the champagne and the brandy, and bought some English cigarettes. An hour to lose until we

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reached London Airport, and it was time to stand up and smile fatuously at the steward, who was politely hovering, in order to serve.

"Your roses, madame."

I looked at them lying there on the rack. I shook my head. I did not want them to come with me. I wanted them to stay in my story of James, in my story of Pierre with whom I had shared an affair of love.

"I hope you have had a pleasant trip." The steward spoke genuinely, although he said the same thing to many other passengers.

"Thank you. Yes indeed. A very pleasant trip."

I moved towards the exit and the steps which lead from the Air France plane to London.

I was going home with a lithograph of Sarah Bernhardt.

